July

The Black Cat

1917

Clever Short Stories

Former United States Senator Mason

Pioneer in Pure Food and Drug Legislation, Father of Rural Free Delivery System

Takes Nuxated Iron

to obtain renewed strength, power and endurance after the hardest fought political campaign of his life in which he was elected Congressman from the State of Illinois. The results he obtained from taking Nuxated Iron were so surprising that

SENATOR MASON NOW SAYS

Nuxated Iron should be made known to every nervous, run down, anaemic man, woman and child.

Opinion of Doctor Howard James, late of the Manhattan State Hospital of New York and formerly Assistant Physician, Brooklyn State Hospital, who has prescribed and thoroughly tested Nuxated Iron in his own private practice.

Former United States Senator Wm. E. Mason, recently elected Member of the United States Congress from Illinois

WHAT SENATOR MASON SAYS:

"I have often said I would never recommend medicine of any kind. I believe that the doctor's place. However, after the hardest political campaign of my life, without a chance for a vacation, I had been starting to court every morning with that horrible tired feeling one cannot describe. I was advised to try Nuxated Iron. As a pioneer in the pure food and drug legislation, I was at first loath to try an advertised remedy, but after advising with one of my medical friends, I gave it a test. The results have been so beneficial in my own case I made up my mind to let my friends know about it, and you are at liberty to publish this statement if you so desire. **I am now sixty-five years of age, and I feel that a remedy which will build up the strength and increase the power of endurance of a man of my age should be known to every nervous, run-down anæmic man, woman and child.**"

Senator Mason's statement in regard to Nuxated Iron was shown to several physicians who were requested to give their opinions thereon.

Dr. Howard James, late of the Manhattan State Hospital of New York, and formerly assistant physician, Brooklyn State Hospital, said:

"Senator Mason is to be commended on handing out this statement on Nuxated Iron for public print. There are thousands of men and women who need a strength and blood-builder, but do not know what to take. There is nothing like organic iron — Nuxated Iron — to give increased strength, snap, vigor and staying power. It enriches the blood, brings roses to the cheeks of women and is an unfailing source of renewed vitality, endurance and power for men who burn up too rapidly their nervous energy in the strenuous strain of the great business competition of the day!"

Dr. E. Sauer, a Boston Physician, who has studied abroad in great European medical institutions, said: "Senator Mason is right. As I have said a hundred times over, organic iron is the greatest of all strength builders.

"Not long ago a man came to me who was nearly half a century old and asked me to give him a preliminary examination for life insurance. I was astonished to find him with a blood pressure of a boy of twenty and as full of vigor, vim and vitality as a young man; in fact, a young man he really was, notwithstanding his age. The secret, he said, was taking organic iron — Nuxated Iron had filled him with renewed life. At thirty he was in bad health; at forty-six he was care worn and nearly all in. Now, at fifty, after taking Nuxated Iron, a miracle of vitality and his face beaming with the buoyancy of youth.

"Iron is absolutely necessary to enable your blood to change food into living tissue. Without it, no matter how much or what you eat, your food merely passes through you without doing you any good. You don't get the strength out of it, and as a consequence you become weak, pale and sickly looking, just like a plant trying to grow in a soil deficient in iron. "If you are not strong or well, you owe it to yourself to make the following test: See how long you can work or how far you can walk without becoming tired. Next take two five-grain tablets of ordinary nuxated iron three times per day after meals for two weeks. Then test your strength again and see how much you have gained. I have seen dozens of nervous, run-down people who were ailing all the while double their strength and endurance and entirely rid themselves of all symptoms of dyspepsia, liver and other troubles in from ten to fourteen days' time simply by taking iron in the proper form. And this, after they had in some cases been doctoring for months without obtaining any benefit. But don't take the old forms of reduced iron, iron acetate, or tincture of iron simply to save a few cents. The iron demanded by Mother Nature for the red coloring matter in the blood of her children is, alas! not that kind of iron. You must take iron in a form that can be easily absorbed and assimilated to do you any good, otherwise it may prove worse than useless.

"Many an athlete and prize-fighter has won the day simply because he knew the secret of great strength and endurance and filled his blood with iron before he went into the affray; while many another has gone down in inglorious defeat simply for the lack of iron."

Senator Mason's championship of Pure Food and Drugs legislation, his fight for the rural free delivery system, and his strong advocacy of all bills favoring labor and the rights of the masses, as against trusts and combines, made him a national figure at Washington and endeared him to the hearts of the working man and the great masses of people throughout the United States. Senator Mason has the distinction of being one of the really big men of the nation. His strong endorsement of Nuxated Iron must convince any intelligent thinking reader that it must be a preparation of very great merit and one which the Senator feels is bound to be of great value to the masses of people everywhere, otherwise he could not afford to lend his name to it, especially after his strong advocacy of pure food and drugs legislation.

Since Nuxated Iron has obtained such an enormous sale — over three million people using it annually — other iron preparations are often recommended as a substitute for it. The reader should remember that there is a vast difference between ordinary metallic iron and the organic iron contained in Nuxated Iron, therefore always insist on having Nuxated Iron as recommended by Dr. Howard James, and other physicians.

NOTE — Nuxated Iron, which is prescribed and recommended above by physicians in such a great variety of cases, is not a patent medicine nor secret remedy, but one which is well known to druggists and whose iron constituents are widely prescribed by eminent physicians both in Europe and America. Unlike the older inorganic iron products, it is easily assimilated, does not injure the teeth, make them black, nor upset the stomach; on the contrary, it is a most potent remedy in nearly all forms of indigestion as well as for nervous, run-down conditions. The manufacturers have such great confidence in nuxated iron that they offer to forfeit $100.00 to any charitable institution if they cannot take any man or woman under 60 who lacks iron, and increase their strength 100 per cent, or over in four weeks' time, provided they have no serious organic trouble. They also offer to refund your money if it does not at least double your strength and endurance in ten days' time. It is dispensed by all good druggists.

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The Black Cat

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THE BLACK CAT CLUB

It is manifestly impossible to do justice to all stories by arbitrarily comparing all varieties at once. It is frequently a matter of personal taste and a question of which type of story fits the mood at the time. They can not all be judged by the same standard, except to this extent that they may all be subjected to much the same test of form, that is, compared as to detail of technique and workmanship. Thus the stories may be grouped. Take for instance two stories treated in this article. *The Subscribers' Serial* may be considered as good a story from the humorous standpoint as *The Clod* is from a serious and æsthetic viewpoint. In this instance, in the final analysis, *The Clod* must be put upon a higher plane not only because of superior technique and literary finish but because such stories are generally considered as worth more to the reading public since stories that stimulate serious thought obviously rank higher than stories that merely amuse. Where two stories represent widely different types, precedence may be determined by deciding which is the superior type. It is only where stories are of the same type and of equal merit as to matter and form that one may legitimately say that one is better than the other by deciding which is the more entertaining of the two.

Many readers do not have the patience to undertake such searching analysis as that necessary to determine which is really the best of eight or nine stories. They discard all standards of measurement. They base their judgment upon the amount of entertainment to be derived from a story rather than upon any known rules of criticism, so that the story that fits the mood is likely to be adjudged the best one in the magazine.

The returns in the April contest resulted in the awarding of the $25 prize to John Berry, author of *The Clod*. A criticism of this and other stories follows. The stories are arranged in the order of their standing in the contest.

The Clod is a grotesquerie that reminds one of Ambrose Bierce. Its theme, murder for an ideal's sake, is strong and novel and is well sustained by distinctive handling. The characters are consistently and carefully developed, although the story is not so much a character study as it is an analysis of the last-day manipulations of the mind of one who is about to die. Choice material and good workmanship combine to make a story that is satisfying in every detail.

In *The Selfishest Woman*, the author cleverly offsets the deep gloom of the real story by the humor in the manner of the telling. It is that implacable critic, the maid, whose vivid and original bits of description veil the horror of it all in a mist of humor. She is consistent to the very last which is more than can be said of her mistress, whose chameleon disposition supplies the twist at the end of the story. Now a twist at the end of a story is supposed to be rather catchy. *It Happened Last Night* won the prize in the January contest and it was built on a twist. But *The Selfishest Woman* is built on an illegitimate twist. The characterization is false, for not one word up to the very end is given to show the reader that Carneen Carmichael is other than as characterized. That a woman of the type drawn would do the thing described is improbable in the highest degree. The author should have drawn a line of distinction between the two kinds of selfishness. Then there is another point in which the story lacks probability. None but the poorest of doctors would have been fooled by the make-up patch on the arm, and even a third-year medical student would have known better than to hazard a diagnosis on so superficial an examination as that given Daggett.

Soft Soap is an example of good short-story form. Within it are incorporated the chief characteristics of the perfect short story, viz.: a single predominating incident, a single pre-eminent character, imagination, plot, compression, organization and unity of impression. The weak point of the whole story is that it leaves the reader with this question: What will Budlong do in the next town? Must we suppose that he goes from town to town making speeches at labor meetings in order to create a demand for his soap or does he acquire the knack of selling his line on the merits of the article itself? Perhaps the reader should not be concerned beyond the end of the story but one cannot help wondering what Budlong would do if the time of his arrival in a certain town did not coincide with the time for a labor meeting to be called to order. Of course he might write ahead and arrange to address various organizations, in which case he would soon develop into a labor agitator or qualify for the Chautauqua Circuit. Doubtless he would find this more remunerative than selling soap.

Although *The Corpse Delicious* is a story saturated with local color and contains an abundance of humor of the W. W. Jacobs type, it is not so interesting as the material of the story would justify. That essential element, suspense, is utterly lacking. Moreover the

(*Continued on Page* 45.)

THE LAW OF THE ABALONE

BY CHART PITT

A shell-hunter conceives a unique and horrible form of man-trap by which to bring about the death of a companion. He puts his plan into execution; but at the critical moment, "a loose pebble turns beneath his shoe sole."

THE heartless, whining song of the homeless winds, drifting landward across the gray miles of the Pacific, softened to a morbid whisper, as Lee Tong staggered from the door of a little driftwood hut that clung to the side of the hill.

The Chinaman was small and misshapen, like the twisted, stunted trees that clung to the storm-swept cliffs. His wizened face was covered with skin as yellow and wrinkled as old leather. If the dwarf ever possessed a soul he had safely hidden it behind that stolid mask. But his narrow slanting eyes held the poison of loneliness—and of hate.

And the fire flared to a dangerous brightness in those eyes as the stunted Celestial heard the cabin door open and close behind him, and the measured thud of confident feet upon the hill-trail, where Long Sing returned to the abalone beach.

The mongrel camps of the shell-hunters never made stranger bedfellows than this pair. One was a stunted son of the peace-loving hordes that swarm along the hot shores of the Yellow Sea; the other, a Mongol from the lonely, upland steppes of the west, a giant Tartar, with the blood of red-cloaked, devil-riding ancestors in his veins.

The man beside the shack stood motionless, watching the straight, tall form of his companion go swinging down the hillside. At that moment Lee Tong might have been mistaken for a graven image that had kept its watch upon that wind-flailed headland for a thousand years.

Then he flung his head back upon his hunched shoulders and bared his yellow fangs to the dazzling sunlight. His claw-like hand fumbled among the folds of his loose garment, and brought out a cleaning-knife with a blade as sinister as the misshapen creature who held it. The flame of passion died in his narrow eyes. Once more he was a soulless clod.

Like an unthinking machine he shuffled down to the fetid heap of abalones below the cabin. His flat nostrils became filled with the loathsome stench of the abalone-scrapings rotting in the sun and his soul rose up in bitter rebellion as he began his work.

For six months he had shared the driftwood hut with the big Tartar; and brooded over the lonely lot of an abalone hunter. He had heard the wind sing its soulless song among the naked rocks until his withered brain had become as lean and hungry as the sunburned hills that shut him away from the companionship he so desperately needed.

Those winds that came out of the west had journeyed far. They bore the perfume of flowers that had bloomed beside a sacred shrine, and were charged with that mystic lure that sets the East apart from the rest of the world. They spoke to Lee Tong of the homeland, China, where the temple-gongs purred in the scented dusk, and the path of life trailed aimlessly under the witchery of the poppy-dreams.

For six months he had taken his turn upon the sun-scorched hill, cleaning the shells that were to buy him a third-class passage back to the land he could never forget.

And this day it should have been Long Sing who cleaned the shells in the reeking swelter of the hillside. But the cards had run against the hunchback the night before, and with the reckless plunging of

the Orient, he had wagered his privilege of taking turn and turn about with his partner, down on the cool abalone beach, for the rest of the summer.

The Tartar once more held the winning hand; so the dwarf must spend the sultry dog days crouching among the fetid mass, while the big Mongol wandered beside the splashing sea, prying the shells from the rocks.

This day of all others, Lee Tong needed to be upon the beach. The day before, while peering through the clear water, he had discovered a giant shell, one that would be worth a month's wages to him if he could hide it among the rocks and not have to share it with his fellow hermit.

Today there was an extremely low tide, and Long Sing would be sure to find the treasure.

The man upon the hillside glimpsed the hard road that led back to the homeland. It was growing longer and more difficult under this new hardship which the fickle cards had put upon him.

As he slashed spitefully at the hated shells, he was half stupefied by the dread conviction that suddenly sprang upon him from the hot silence. A gloating voice seemed to whisper that Lee Tong never would look upon the hills of his childhood. His misshapen bones never would rest in the sacred soil of China, where his fathers slept.

For years he had carried that hope with him. It had been the one ray of sunshine in his lean life. Now the sullen-mouthed winds were taunting him because he was old, and his dream could never come true.

The sun swung past the meridian and slanted off toward the brassy sea. There was less sting to its lashing rays that fell upon the yellow face of the hunchback; but the fire of hate and madness burned with an added fury in his blood.

Gradually the rebellious passion that had goaded the little Chinaman to the verge of madness, centered upon his more favored companion who idled away his time upon the abalone beach. Lee Tong knew he was loitering down there,—knew he had cheated at cards the night before, so that he could get a chance to take life easy for the rest of the summer.

By the time the sun had touched the far rim of the Pacific, the dwarf had worked himself into a fury. That flaming ball of red was looking down upon the hills of China—hills that he never would see.

"I *will* go." He flung his challenge to the winds, as he braced himself upon his crooked legs. He smiled his wolfish grin at the long-bladed cleaning-knife as he ran his finger along its keen edge. Then, without looking behind him, he stalked off down the hill-trail that led to the beach.

The faithful, dog-like brain of Lee Tong, the Chinaman, had broken at last under the terrible strain of solitude, where the lonely winds kept whining like the voice of a soul lost in the world's first night. In that moment, the mad brain of the dwarf went groping back across the months for something tangible upon which to base his hate for the big Tartar.

In a flash, he remembered. It was a rain-soaked night in mid-winter. The arc-lights had glistened in a sea of silver mist, and the wet pavements had been blotched like blood-stains from the glow of lighted shop windows. There had been a brass horn and a drum that beat out a strange, wild tune that got into the blood. A man in uniform had shaken a blood-red flag at the crowd, calling upon them to forget their false gods, and follow him.

And Long Sing had stepped out from the motley rabble of the street and balanced his ponderous form upon a packing-case. With the blood and fire of the hill clans, he had spoken of the new religion that wiped away the tears of the world. He had heaped his biting sarcasm upon the flowers that blossom under the shadow of the poppy smoke; and had sworn that his father's bones were the bones of a sinner who never had seen the true light.

Lee Tong had forgiven him for speaking those sacrilegious words, because his own body was small and misshapen, and his misguided countryman was of faultless form.

He forgave,—and speedily forgot. Now

it came back to him with the force of a blow. It was the poison of the new religion that had festered in Long Sing's soul and allowed him to take advantage of the cards; to send his stunted companion to the filthy shell-pile while he amused himself on the cool beach. That was the way of the white masters whom the Tartar tried to imitate. They were always putting some new burdens upon the shoulders of the yellow man.

With the single-track reasoning of the madman, Lee Tong found it easy to trace every hardship he ever had suffered to the door of his proselyte countryman. Nor were material things forgotten in the mad demand for revenge. He gloated over the summer's harvest of rainbow-hued shells, and realized that they would carry him back to the homeland, and leave something for his last years—*for there would be no other man to share them with in the morning.*

But he must make no mistake. The long arm of the law was only too ready to punish the yellow man. It was the cunning of the East pitted against the tyranny of the West,—and the wisdom of the ancient East must find a way.

With the cunning in which the Oriental is adept, Lee Tong followed the hill trail, his twisted brain filled with a multitude of horrible schemes that would fool the greedy law. A thousand things suggested themselves. The very silence of the dying day was teeming with possible ways to pay that grewsome debt of blood which the hunchback believed he owed his stalwart companion.

One by one, he examined them, then discarded them. When he swung down among the crags that rose sheer above the abalone beach, he was still groping for some means that would be safe—the one perfect way—something that would be an honor to his vengeance-loving ancestors who slept in the sacred soil of the homeland.

Nothing was moving among the shattered rocks that formed the snarling coast of California.

Instinctively, the Chinaman's eyes sought the lower beach line and focused themselves upon the rock wall where the giant abalone clung in the path of the flooding tide. A deeper blotch among the shadows justified Lee Tong's fears. The proselyte had discovered the monster shell which would bring a handsome price from some curio collector. He had waited for the coming of night to spirit it away unknown to his companion.

Then the thing for which Lee Tong's mind had been groping, suddenly flashed upon him, perfected to the last detail. It was the one faultless plan—something that would make his dead ancestors turn over in their graves with envy.

With eager feet the misshapen creature scrambled over the slippery boulders. He spurned the slower and safer trail that wound down to the lower beach. Like a goat he leaped from terrace to terrace, straight down the side of the cliffs where one false step would plunge him to death among the snarling rocks below.

Long Sing heard him coming among the rocks and lifted his head suspiciously. The dwarf glided up, a picture of innocent unconcern.

"Ho! catchum very big one," the hunchback wheezed in well feigned surprise. "Don't hurt him with the knife,—he very valuable shell,—worth lot of money."

"Him too big," the Tartar grunted back, falling into pidgin English, which was a sure sign that he was excited. "Him pinch like hell."

"We wait a minute and the big devil him think we go away,—then we grab him quick,—and get him loose before he knows anything about it. You big, strong man —not afraid of abalone."

There was logic in Lee Tong's words. Both men knew from experience that a quick, unexpected thrust would loosen even a large shell, one that would have to be literally cut from the rock if given time to bring its tremendous vacuum power into play.

However, there was nothing logical in the mad eyes of the hunchback; but the gathering darkness hid his grewsome secret from the world. The blood tingled in his veins;—he would show how a crooked-back man paid his feud-debt. In

a moment the spirits of his sires, whose bones rested in the sacred soil of the homeland, would witness vengeance such as they never were privileged to know.

The only thing that troubled Lee Tong was that the whole affair seemed too simple. He would have preferred to settle the blood-debt with a flourish of dramatic show. A fool could play this game if he had thought of it; that was the point,—a fool never *would* have thought of it. Chinamen had loved and hated for a thousand years, but it was left for Lee Tong, the hunchback, to discover the one perfect revenge.

It needed only a quick thrust with his claw-like fingernail, and the giant abalone would snap its shell against the rock, and Long Sing would be a prisoner, counting the slow march of the minutes that brought the flood-tide back to cover the snarling cliffs of the California coast. Inch by inch it would creep up about the stalwart form of the Mongol—until the end. Surely that was vengeance such as his fathers never knew.

Lee Tong shuffled his feet in the gravel in readiness for the thrust that would spring the sinister man-trap—and then a quick leap backwards to safety before the cruel jaws snapped upon their prey. A loose pebble turned beneath his shoe sole, and with the instinct born of months of climbing among the cliffs, his other foot gouged for a protecting hold upon the ground. The resultant tremor shot along his tense, over-charged nerves, passing out at his finger-tips; and with it came the reflex action of muscles.

Like the snapping of steel jaws, the giant shell crashed down against the rock, gripping both men's fingers beneath it as in a vice.

In that first moment of surprised agony, the hunchback weakened. Like a wounded pig, he bared his yellow fangs, and his soulless cry drowned the shivering whisper of waves against the barrier rocks. For a moment he made the night hideous with his mad lament. Then once more he was a part of the stolid East, where every emotion is hidden beneath a mask-like face.

There had been no sound from the other victim except the whistling rush of breath through close-drawn lips. It was the defiant spirit of the steppes that had made a mockery of death upon a hundred battlefields.

A thin-voiced wind began its eerie calling among the cliffs. It was the chill breath of the deep-sea that rode in the wake of the flooding tide. Lee Tong shivered at the sound. He knew that the tide had turned. Once more the untamed waters of the Pacific were rushing back to the land, to cover the snarling crags in a smother of milk-white foam.

The night deepened about them. One by one, the blue stars blazed out above the lean, hungry hills. A belated flock of cormorants came flapping in from the sea, headed for their rookery among the crags. For a half hour the protesting voice of the birds jangled their discordant chorus, as the newcomers crowded about in search of a choice roosting place. When at last their commotion died down, it left the night silences unpeopled by a solitary sound except the low strumming of distant beaches that were beginning to throb to the beat of long, green swells that rode in the flooding tide.

Beneath his mask of stolid unconcern, the hunchback quailed as he heard that hollow, sinister voice that was drawing closer through the night. He watched a star that was creeping higher and higher above the crags, and thus measured the slow passing of the hours.

Lee Tong was of the East, and had sipped the germs of fatalism with his mother's milk. He neither repented nor hoped to escape from the vampire thing that held him a prisoner in the path of the rising tide. His plans had miscarried and he was waiting to pay the price. His misshapen bones never would rest in the sacred soil of China, but his spirit would be there before the red sun flared up over the thirsty hills.

The wind freshened to a gale, and the engulfing waters quickened their pace under the sting of its flailing lash. The drumming of surf on the barrier rocks began to fill the night with its mad lament.

Foam-balls drifted through the darkness. They touched the withered cheek of Lee Tong as they floated past. The little Chinaman shivered, as if the fingers of the dead had touched him. He was growing weary of waiting. The death that was crawling upon him was slow in coming. He slipped down as far as his gnarled arms would allow and felt with his feet for a touch of the water he could hear gurgling among the gravel at every rush of the swell against the barrier rocks.

Like a statue of black marble, the giant Tartar towered above him, clear cut against the stars. The sight filled Lee Tong with a comforting joy. He had feasted his soul upon the thought of crouching among the rocks and watching the proselyte die. Things had not worked out as he had planned, but that part of the picture would come true, he would be there to whisper an evil prayer as the big man died.

Then a new agony marked him from the darkness,—something that his mad brain had forgotten. He cursed the fingers of the Creator that had left him like a stunted tree, trailing its branches in the famished soil, while the Mongol towered above him, even in this hour of death, as he had in life.

The proselyte would die; that was certain. But Lee Tong would not be there to gloat over his death-agony. The rising tide would swirl above the spot where his deformed body swung in the grip of the greedy man-trap, and his treasured queue would flap to every surge of the deep-sea swell, the sport of the fishes and rock-crabs that would swarm to the feast. In that hour, the blue stars would look down upon the heroic form of the Tartar standing alone beside the rock wall, neck-deep in the creeping water, waiting, silent-lipped, in the path of the flood.

The wind fluttered out its last sobbing breath among the steeple-crags—and died. But the madness it had put upon the sea, lived after it. The great waves came purring in from the Pacific and broke against the barrier rocks. The whole beach shivered under the concussions of those sledge-hammer blows. The cormorants squawked restlessly among the crags. The half-minutes of silence that lay in the trough of the waves were filled with the hollow sucking of the backwash and the metallic tinkle of water scurrying over the rough surfaces of the beach-boulders. Then the cold hand of the Pacific reached up through the noisy darkness and touched Lee Tong's foot with its groping fingers. Like the beating of the black wings of death, the flood-tide swells thundered against the snarling California coast; and inch by inch, the water crept up about the crooked legs of the dwarf.

Then the terrible blackness was filled with the soothing voice that rang half-familiar, half-strange in Lee Tong's long lobed ears.

"Brother, if thy hand offend thee, cut it off. For it is better that the hand should perish, than that the body should be given to the sea," the giant Tartar repeated in an awed whisper that carried above the drumming of the outer beaches.

The hunchback strained at the rainbow-hued shell that held him. His memory rushed back to the town he had left behind; where Long Sing had stood in the silver mist of the rain-soaked night, and spoken words like these to the motley rabble of the street. Yet it was the poison of that new religion which made the proselyte victorious even in the face of the supreme defeat of death. A snarling retort was upon Lee Tong's lips, when the whispering voice continued:

"My knife is fresh sharpened, and a few slashes will set me free. It is in my belt. You can reach it with your teeth if I bend over."

Something in the purring voice of the big Mongol whipped the fire of hate from the mad brain of the dwarf. For the moment he was under a compelling impulse to help this man whom he had come to kill. Perhaps there was nothing in that new religion to keep the proselyte from saving his life by slashing the faultless hands which God had given him. But Lee Tong would die rather than return to the land of the poppy-dreams without the gnarled claws that had earned his right to live for fifty lean years.

Mechanically he obeyed the request of his fellow victim; then turned his head away to contemplate the slow creeping of the water that meant the end.

A whistling intake of breath told him that the proselyte was slashing his faultless body to save his miserable life. There was nothing but pity for the man's weakness in the heart of Lee Tong now. Let the coward live if he would.

The next moment, a splashing in the water roused the dwarf from his bitter reflections. Long Sing reeled back from the man-trap—free—and an object for charity for the rest of his days.

Like a madman, the Tartar clawed about in the swirling water. Lee Tong strained his eyes to follow his form through the darkness. What new form of insanity was this? Why didn't he escape while there was time?

Then once more the Mongol towered against the stars as he reeled back through the lapping flood. For a moment he swayed drunkenly. Then his mangled arms came up out of the water, clutching a boulder to his bloody breast.

Like the hammer of Thor, the rock crashed down upon the vampire shell; and Lee Tong scrambled up the slippery side of the cliff, guiding the steps of the giant, who reeled from the loss of blood.

When they had reached the safety of the cliffs, and Lee Tong had stopped the flow of blood with bandages torn from his shirt, he stood in the trembling star-shine and looked down into that black abyss from which he had escaped.

"A man must be brave to cut off his hands—even to save his life," he admitted, without a trace of emotion in his voice.

"My life?" the big man gasped, in the agony of muscles that were beginning to swell under the bandages. "I'm too tall for that tide to hurt me any,—it wouldn't have covered your head if it hadn't been for the wind pushing the water into the cove, —and in the morning the shell would loosen when the sun got hot."

"Is that the way of the white man—the way of the new religion?" the hunchback stammered.

"That's all right," the Tartar soothed him, dropping back into the pidgin English of the abalone camps. "White man make very good wooden hands. Long Sing stand on street corner and sell fruit, —Lee Tong go back to China, where they got to have all their fingers to make living."

The dwarf looked up at the man who had saved his life. The blue starlight softened the lines of his homely face.

"Lee Tong never go back to China; he's going to learn the new religion." There was still a touch of the fatalistic East in his awed voice. "God made Lee Tong's body crooked like the manzanita trees that grow among the rocks, but he made his memory as tall and straight as the redwoods back in the forest. I think if little man like me stand on street corner and tell everybody about the thing Long Sing done to save the life of a miserable, no-good Chinaman—then fellows buy a lot of fruit."

The cormorants moved restlessly among the rocks. The drumming of the outer beaches softened till it was nothing but a lullaby,—a droning chant of brotherhood, —as two shadows crept up the hill-trail and merged into the murk of the night.

NEXT month: THE GLOVED REVENGE, *by John Berry*, author of THE CLOD, the prize winning story in the April number. (See page 2.)

THE JUNGLE'S ACCOLADE

BY HAPSBURG LIEBE

Man cannot possibly survive without the aid of the rib that was taken from him and improved so long ago. In this story, the characters are confronted by a difficult situation, for there are nine men and only one rib.

UGUST SLAEGER ran guns and ammunition from Chinese ports to Emilio Aguinaldo's army, made counterfeit pesos, smuggled silks and whiskies and opium, and was father and king to as fine a crowd of cheese-colored Malay cutthroats as one would care to see beheaded; and he did it all in spite of, even in defiance of, the more or less efficient secret service the Americans had organized in Manila. It was not safe to cross August Slæger,—who, his name notwithstanding, lacked a great deal of being all German,—and it was nothing short of dangerous to know too much concerning his affairs, for those who did, had a fashion of disappearing mysteriously and completely. Slæger balked at the shedding of blood when there was a less violent and sure alternative; for bloodshed was messy, and it was too apt to leave a trail behind it. Those smart detectives, they caught men by their fingerprints!

George Leef sat up weakly in the thick blackness and tried to remember. At first his brain seemed wooden. Then he began with the moment when he had broken conference with the president of the Manila Banking Company, and shadowed himself down the Escolta and into the San Miguel. He had ordered a glass of red beer. The almond-eyed waiter had looked at him queerly as the beer was put on the small mahogany table before him. He had left the San Miguel and gone in a caromatta toward his hotel on the Calle Alix; he remembered being sleepy, very sleepy....

The thing he was sitting on, or in, lurched suddenly, and he instinctively threw out his hands. His fingers sank into a soft, damp, hairy mass that gave up a peculiar, rotting odor; this he immediately recognized as old abaca, native hemp. The strong scent of old copra was in his nostrils, too. Then he knew; he was a prisoner in the hold of a little island schooner. He quickly reasoned out the truth: he had been only too well acquainted with the works of August Slæger, and he was being taken to join those other unfortunates whom Slæger had so mysteriously put out of the world of men. But Leef was not very much frightened; to him it was another adventure in a land of adventures, and nothing more.

He looked around him. Not a ray of light was visible. Either it was night, or the hatch covers had been carefully and closely fastened down. He could hear nothing save the occasional slush!—ush! of the little vessel's bluff bows as they drove themselves into the foaming waters of a deep sea swell, or the occasional slatting of dirty sails. An hour passed. The schooner lurched violently and heeled over, and George Leef was thrown halfway across the bottom of the stuffy, ill-smelling hold. His hands collided with the legs of a big man, and the unknown moaned. Leef shook the legs hard.

"Get up, you!" he commanded.

The heavy figure writhed uncertainly and moaned again. Again Leef shook him and sharply ordered him to get up. For a reply there came the half coherent mouthing of one who is not quite conscious, and in it Leef caught the name of a woman whom he knew slightly.

"Get up!" repeated Leef; this time he shouted it.

The man sat up slowly and with difficulty, muttering, "Who are you?" There was a foreign twang to his speech. Leef could hear his labored breathing.

"It appears that I'm somebody that August Slæger doesn't especially like," answered George Leef. "And I take it that you're another such person; eh?"

"August Slæger," mumbled the other, as the truth dawned on him also, "why, yes, of course, *mon ami*, it must be Slæger's work. I am Raoul de Montefort, of the *Campania Maritima*. The American Government, you know, offered a considerable reward for evidence that would convict Slæger, the fox, and I had a chance to get it easily. So here I am with you, and," quietly, "we are doomed."

"I remember you now," said Leef. "I met you at the Trevanas' *baile grande* in May. You were monopolizing the attention of the prettiest girl in Manila."

"Ah, the Englishwoman!" De Montefort exclaimed. "Yes, Celeste is quite the prettiest girl in Manila. And you are—"

"George Leef, formerly a lieutenant in a volunteer infantry outfit, at present a member of the Manila Secret Service," supplied the American. "Tell me this," he went on, "how did they get you?"

"How did they get me?" The Frenchman collected his thoughts rapidly. "I was walking with Celeste on the Luneta, just at nightfall, when a black cloth—really, it must have been a blanket—but *mon Dieu!* Celeste! What became of her? Here am I but where is she?"

From the blackness to his right came a feminine voice in tones that were low and as clear as the tones of a bell of silver: "Your solicitude is rather sudden, isn't it, Monsieur de Montefort?" somewhat whimsically. "You quarreled with me during the entire afternoon!"

"Celeste!" painfully. "You too!"

"Why not?" murmured the young woman. "I recognized August Slæger, from your description of him, among those who attacked you; you had told me all that you had found out concerning him; I knew too much, you see. If, as you say, we are doomed—"

Her voice broke pitifully, in spite of her. Neither man ventured to speak for a minute. It seemed to them that there was nothing to say. Why should they raise a hope that must soon be shattered? De Montefort now thought only of Celeste, and Leef was a hundred times more than sorry for her. She was a hothouse plant, a hyacinthine creature, ethereally beautiful, with her sky-blue eyes and golden-yellow hair. In her way, doubtless, she was strong; but it was a strength that was unused to coping with such desperate situations as this.

After two leaden hours, a ray of light, feeble at first, came down from between two warped boards in the hatch-cover directly over their heads. Day had dawned. Though they knew that they could scarcely better their condition by gaining the cutthroat-lined deck above, Leef and De Montefort searched everywhere for a possibility of escape—and failed to find it. More hours went dragging soddenly by, and the three in the hold began to suffer from thirst. Leef and the Frenchman called aloud, but there was no response. The little ship might well have been a phantom ship. There was no sound save the slatting, now and then, of the dirty sails, and, now and then, the maddening slush!—ush! of the bluff bows in the foaming brine.

Late in the afternoon, the hatch over the prisoners was opened about halfway, and a row of diabolically grinning Malay faces peered down into the semi-gloom of the hold. Among them was one great face that was unforgetable; it was darker, more cunning and more barbaric than the others, and from its thin upper lip dangled a coal-black, walrus-like mustache. In this savage seaman's veins ran the blood of the wily Chinese pirate, the fierce Moro, the South Sea Islands cannibal.

"Me Ngan Tai-Po; me skipper," he said proudly, addressing Celeste in particular, while the two big men at the young woman's side stared and wished wildly for a weapon.

Celeste's countenance was full of the spirit of entreaty. "Give us water, and something to eat," she begged.

Ngan Tai-Po went nimbly to his bare

feet and faced about, and those below saw at his waistline the flash of the silver-mounted hilt of a flame-shaped Moro kris, deadliest of all daggers. He spoke in his pidgin English. Another moment, and a huge white man leaned over the edge of the hatch. He had curly black hair and pointed black mustaches; his eyes were keen and sparkling, and his jaw was that of a beast. The prisoners at once recognized him; it was August Slæger, arch-criminal, himself.

"Give us water," pleaded Celeste, "and something to eat."

"Close the hatch," ordered Slæger; and his men hastily obeyed him.

Another night came, and with it, lowering clouds and rain and strong winds.

When the new day was two hours old, the schooner was brought to in waters that were fairly calm. The three who knew too much were taken, one by one, to the slippery deck, and thence to a small boat that rocked restlessly beside its mother vessel. Another half hour saw them placed on the palm-lined shore of an island that was far from the steamer lanes, and there they were left—marooned! The small boat returned to the schooner, and the schooner made sail and began to merge into the drab horizon.

Celeste and the two men sought the shelter of a clump of fruitless banana plants. The woman looked first at one, then at the other, of her companions. There was a hint of reproach in the light of her blue eyes.

"We couldn't prevent it," said Leef. "If we had but raised a finger, they would have killed us."

Celeste could not doubt it. She remembered the krises, the barongs, the weapons of the Malays.

"Is this where the others who disappeared were taken, I wonder?" she asked.

"Without doubt," answered the American. "I saw a strip of cloth hanging from a bamboo a little way around the beach; it is one of their futile distress signals."

"The wind is rising, and the rain is coming again," observed De Montefort. "We must find a better shelter for poor Celeste."

They went toward the interior of the island. It was a jungle of tall grasses and liana vines, banana-plants and bamboos, stunted seraya trees and stately cocoanut palms; starring it here and there were flowering hibiscus, ilang-ilang, frangipani, wild orange.

Fifteen minutes of difficult traveling, and they drew up in an open space before five huts of different sizes and shapes. These were of bamboo framework tied with vines and thatched with grasses. At the biggest of them Leef hallooed. His call was answered immediately. From the huts came five men in tatters—men whose gaunt faces were almost hidden under varying lengths of beard. Their eyes were wide and expectant; it was plain that they hoped for rescue.

"Slæger's colony!" exclaimed De Montefort. "Gentlemen, I regret to say we have come to join you—"

"Let's get the little lady in the dry," cut in Leef.

He caught Celeste by an arm and hurried her into the biggest of the five huts, and the others crowded in behind him. Brackish water was brought in bamboo joints and in cocoanut shells; the five bearded men also produced mangoes and plantains, smoke-dried fish, and cold iguana meat that had been soaked in sea-water for hours before being broiled on hot stones. While those who were thirsty and hungry drank and ate, the others squatted, after the fashion of the most primitive peoples and watched silently. And always their eyes strayed back to the woman.

The man who wore the longest beard, of course, had been marooned longest. He was a big blonde man, serious, viking-like. To him George Leef turned with eager questions the moment his appetite was halfway satisfied. The answers came readily, intelligently:

His name was Illsworth; he was an English adventurer, and he had once captained a vessel for August Slæger. His four companions were named Kovski, Weinberg, Sanquebel, and Bellini. They called it Hell's Island. There was plenty to eat and to drink, such as it was. Al-

ways they had fruits for the taking. With stones and clubs they killed sea-birds and iguanas. They stretched a strong bamboo and liana fence across the mouth of a little inlet at high tide and had fish when the tide went out; once they caught a monster saw-fish. Sea-water salt was their gold. Weapons? They had only small knives that they had made of steel springs taken from their shoe soles, and clubs. More and more, they were growing accustomed to the life; less and less, they longed for the world beyond the sea—

"But why," interrupted De Montefort, "didn't Slæger kill us outright instead of —of this? I cannot understand it!"

The man of the longest beard smiled indulgently. "Slæger," he answered, "always fears being caught and convicted. To kill a man is one thing, you know, and to maroon him for a year or so is another thing. It may be that he figures on making his release the price of our salvation, in the event they get the goods on him; who can tell?"

At that, De Montefort saw a ray of hope. "What a party this is, *mes amis!*" he exclaimed light-heartedly. A representative of almost every nation is here among us—how peculiar! But you English, there are two of you, while—"

He had turned smilingly toward Celeste, and something he saw in her face stopped him. She rose, slender and straight, that ethereally beautiful, hyacinthine creature, and her golden-yellow head almost touched the thatched roof.

"While the matter may be one of small importance, Raoul," she protested mildly, "I wish you wouldn't presume so. I am not an Englishwoman; though if I were, I should not be ashamed of it. You can hardly classify my nationality. I have, I think, a little of the blood of all of you, and I am proud of every drop of it. I am only—a woman."

There was something very striking in her manner of saying it. For a silent moment the deeply-set eyes of the viking-like Illsworth drank in her delicate beauty; then he bent one great, bare knee, and made a sweeping salute over the imaginary breech of an imaginary rifle.

"Hail to the Queen of Hell's Island!" he said smilingly and yet seriously. "And God save our queen!"

The others quickly took the cue. They repeated, with a worthy enthusiasm, "God save our queen!"

"This hut I give to her for her palace," continued Illsworth.

The men went to one of the other huts; there they sat in solemn council, and pledged themselves to loyalty to their liege lady as long as they lived on the island. But the pledges of men are sometimes not even so good as scraps of paper ....

About noon a furious tropical storm sprang up, in which there was little or no rain. An hour before sunset, Celeste and her seven subjects went to the north beach to watch the storm die in the waves, and there came face to face with August Slæger and his savage skipper, Ngan Tai-Po. The two were drenched with sea-water and half drowned, hatless and coatless and weaponless. A broken and splintered hatch-cover, lying where the waves had cast it up, told of the manner of their coming.

"So!" cried the Frenchman. "Your vessel was wrecked, and you are to have a taste of your own medicine! Where are the others?"

Slæger spat wryly and said nothing. Ngan Tai-Po answered sullenly: "Him all sink in sea."

"These," said Celeste, queerly for her, "were the strongest, therefore they survived. It is the greatest of all laws, that only the strongest may survive."

"There's no escape for us now," growled Illsworth. "None but Slæger and that one crew knew of the existence of this faraway island. Well, with a vine we hang Slæger and that dusky there—"

"No," Celeste objected; "we hang nobody, yet. You, yourself, named me Queen of Hell's Island, and queen of Hell's Island I am. These two shall be slaves to us; they shall gather the fruits; catch the fish; kill the birds and the iguanas that we eat, and bring water for us."

At this, August Slæger found his

tongue. His heavy countenance was clouded with wrath; his big hands clenched as he took a step toward Celeste.

"I will be no slave for you, you ——"

George Leef, American, struck him squarely in the face and closed his brutal mouth over a name that was not good. He reeled backward, caught his footing, and went with a roar of insensate rage toward Leef—and Leef met him halfway and knocked him down.

"Enough of that," quietly said Celeste. She bent over the supine August Slæger. "So you refuse, now and forever, to be a slave to us?"

"Yes!" declared Slæger. The word gurgled through blood.

Celeste straightened and turned to the big Englishman. "Mr. Illsworth," she smiled, "you may get your vine."

Only when the stiff noose was placed about Slæger's neck did he give in. Like the coward he was at the core, he begged, pleaded, implored and whined. Celeste gave him his life, and he and Ngan Tai-Po, from that same hour, began their slavish servitude.

The next day was a beautiful one. Hell's Island had become an emerald gem set in the sunlit and shimmering tropical sea. Late in the afternoon, George Leef came upon Celeste walking alone on the west beach, half a mile from the huts. She appeared to be thoughtful, but she showed no sign of grieving over the fate that had been forced upon her, and for that Leef was very glad. He noted that a hibiscus blossom gleamed in the gold of her hair, and that she wore a spray of sweet ilang-ilang at her belt.

"It's hardly safe, is it," he said smilingly, baring his head respectfully, "for you to be so far from the protection of your more or less gallant knights? Slæger and that cannibal man of his were not hung with a vine, you know, as they should have been."

"Not hung!" exclaimed Celeste, as though the idea shocked her. "We'll pass that up, Mr. Leef, if you please."

"All right," Leef agreed. "But—it's better to hang a man before than after. I liked the way you put that survival business yesterday, Queen Celeste. 'Survival of the strongest' seems to me a better expression than 'survival of the fittest.' And yet, the strongest are generally the fittest. I find myself wondering—who will be the survivors, the two survivors, of this, Hell's Island?"

"I wish they had called it by some other name," murmured the woman. "Eden Island for instance."

"It's appropriate," said Leef, "except that there are too many Adams and too many Satans here."

"Why," suddenly asked Celeste, "shouldn't we all survive and ultimately be rescued?"

For a moment, Leef was silent. Then he blurted: "Listen to me, and try to remember all I say—and I'm going to talk fast, for there may be an interruption at any minute.

"There are men on this island who will come to love you madly, savagely, before long. It is the inevitable. And upon your—er diplomacy, depends largely your safety and the safety of the rest of us. You must try to be as unfeminine and uninteresting as a wooden joss,—which will be hard for you; and you must be careful that you show no particular favor to any of us. Why? The thin veneer of civilization wears off quickly in places like this and under circumstances such as these, and most men are jealous and unreasoning brutes when that veneer is gone—that's why. It is not easy for me to say these things to you so bluntly, but it's better for you to know. And now please go back to your palace, Queen Celeste," with a bow and a very little smile, "and I beg you not to go so far from it when you walk out alone again."

At first she seemed on the verge of anger, but the light of appreciation soon broke over her countenance.

"I'll remember, and I'll try hard to obey," she promised; and with that she held out a very dainty hand to him.

Leef raised the hand to his lips and kissed it with a certain reverence. Already he loved her, but it was not because she

was the only one of her sex in his narrow world; he would have chosen her from a million times a million women.

As she went toward the huts, he followed to guard her.

Months went by. The love of George Leef grew and grew, but he smothered it bravely. Neither by word nor by look did he give a sign of it even to Celeste; rather, he appeared to be anything but fond of her, and he feigned so well that Celeste herself was deceived and more than a little piqued, for Celeste, as she had once told her subjects, was only a woman. Each of the other men, love-mad, had begged their queen to make him King of Hell's Island by taking solemn marriage vows with him before God, and this included the slaves August Slæger and Ngan Tai-Po. But the queen would not. In no way would she show an especial favor.

As the days ran endlessly on, tigerish blood sprang up between the seven men; they had received the primitive accolade of cave and jungle, and they were ready to grapple with God and Destiny in their determination to win the kingship of Celeste's heart. They walked and ate and slept with clubs in their hands. Soon they began to fight, and each fight was a little longer, and a little harder, and a little bloodier than those that had preceded it. The lust for battle was as contagious as the germs of a contagious fever; even George Leef, and the Frenchman, and Illsworth, who would have been inseparable friends elsewhere, came to blows at the slightest provocation. Leef held his own with all of them; but he had to use his teeth when he fought the big Englishman.

An afternoon came when Celeste slyly whispered to the American and asked him to meet her on the west beach. Leef knew that it would mark him as the lame wolf of the pack, if the meeting became known, but he went. He found her looking distraught.

"Something terrible seems bound to happen soon," she began. "What can I do to prevent it?"

"You mean, of course, that our 'survival of the strongest' stunt is going to be pulled off," muttered Leef. "I don't know what to advise you to do. And I'm sorry I don't. But when the extremity comes, you may count on me."

Celeste straightened, there on the pure white sands, before him, and a flush ran over her hyacinthine, flower-like face. "Why is it that *you* dislike me," she demanded imperiously, "when all the rest are wild with love for me?"

A struggle began in the American's breast; that strange thing that made him like to sleep on the ground in the blessed dark was goring away at the remnants of civilization's thin veneer. He did not speak. Celeste went on, passionately and yet innocently:

"I am human, and I have the great weakness—or is it a great strength?—of the human race: That which I possess, I do not want; I want that which is denied me; I want your regard. George Leef, why do you dislike me?"

"Dislike you!" cried Leef. "Celeste, I love you more than any other man ever loved any other woman in the world! I hoped so strongly that you cared for me that I believed you did; and then, for your safety's sake and for my own safety's sake, I pretended...."

Half an hour later, Eugenio Sanquebel, the Spaniard, dashed from the jungle to the centre of the space that had been cleared about the huts. His dark face was working almost convulsively.

"Illsworth!" he called. "Illsworth!"

The Englishman dropped a strip of paper mulberry bark that he had been beating out for tapa and hastened to Sanquebel.

"Illsworth," fumed the Spaniard, "your cake and my cake and the cakes of these others is what you call dough, as you would say! *Maria Santissima!* Did I not see Celeste kiss that Americano but now, there on the beach? Twice she kissed him,—long kisses,—with her arms about his neck; no, it was a dozen times, Illsworth. And he said to her: 'Darrling!' Softly like that: 'Darrling!'"

"So that is why," mumbled white-faced Illsworth; "that is why."

While the six half-naked men were talking and swearing over that which was to them the loss of all that was worth having, George Leef appeared in the open space behind them and overheard. He gripped his seraya club, straightened proudly in his tatters, and stood waiting and staring defiantly. He knew that between them, the six of them and the one of him, there must be blood-red hatred and war unto death. And August Slæger and Ngan Tai-Po,—they too, would be his mortal enemies when they learned. It was a fearful situation. The pack is always quick to fall upon the lame wolf.

"Do you really expect to get away with it?" said Illsworth.

To spar was as futile as a whisper in pandemonium. To attempt to reason with them was also futile. There was no mongrel strain in them; they represented the average, rather than the slush, of humanity; it was the jungle's accolade. And yet, Leef tried to reason with them.

"Is it fair for eight men to fight one?" he asked quietly. "I did not try to win Celeste's favor; you know that. If she chooses me for a husband from the nine of us, it is no fault of mine."

"True, O King," sneered the Englishman; and he added, with a contemptuous twist to his bearded lips: "thou royal imbecile!"

They stepped toward him. The American raised his club and took a step backward, and the others saw his great muscles rippling and slipping lithely, leoninely, under his bare and sunburned skin. "I'll get three of you, anyway—and you first, Illsworth," he declared.

From the jungle wall, Celeste had been watching and listening, unobserved.

Now she ran between George Leef and his enemies.

"You think you are men, you six," she panted, and her eyes flashed like the flash of fire, while the part of her clean, rangy figure that showed through her tattered clothing, had the tensity of a statue of iron, "but you are no more than paper dolls! Whoever touches this one man shall die a terrible death—and not at the hands of George Leef!"

The six dispersed, and as Kovski turned away there came from deep in his hairy throat, a rumble that was much like the growl of a dog. Each knew that to make a hostile move toward the American, in the presence of Celeste, would be to lose favor with her for all time. Therefore they chose to wait. Any night they could kill him,—any night.

But that night, by orders of the Queen of Hell's Island, the one man slept hidden in a bamboo thicket, and early in the morning he met the slave, August Slæger, and the two fought savagely.

Several hours later, Ngan Tai-Po rushed excitedly to Illsworth's hut.

"Slæger, my master," he mouthed, his walrus-like mustaches bobbing up and down ludicrously, "him dead! Lugu-lugu kill my master!"

"Lugu-lugu, your great-grandmother!" sneered Illsworth. Always he sneered now.

"A great serpent, eh?" came sourly from De Montefort. "There isn't a snake on this island, Tai."

However, they followed Ngan Tai-Po into the jungle. Lying under a flowering tree, face downward, they found August Slæger. In the top of his head there was an even row of four small holes, each of which was of about the diameter of a man's third finger.

"He was unfit to survive, therefore he perished," quietly said Celeste. She continued: "Those are the marks of teeth."

And she was right: they were the marks of teeth!

Her voice, low and strong, came again: "This child of the dust, this paper doll, dared to lay his hands on George Leef. He died a terrible death, as I had threatened. And so it shall be with all who dare to lay their hands on George Leef."

The silence which followed was finally broken by Ngan Tai-Po,—by Ngan Tai-Po, the jungle-born and the godless:

"No got mucho iguana meat." With a bare brown toe shaped like an adder's head, he touched that which had been his master. "Him fat. Me cook him. Him better meat iguana meat. *Segoro!*"

Celeste gave him a quick, sickened

glance. "Take Slæger to the sharks," she commanded, turning toward the huts.

During the weeks that came next, Leef slept hidden in the jungle.

The original five and De Montefort very soon threw off the impression the mysterious affair had made upon their minds. The primitive life was new; they had no traditional superstitions or beliefs to uphold their remembrance of Slæger's strange and tragic death. One day Bellini attacked Leef; and, although Leef had whipped him, Bellini met the same weird and apparently inexplainable fate that had overtaken August Slæger. Then Weinberg went in the same way, then Illsworth, then Kovski, then Sanquebel, then De Montefort; all within half a year, and there was left on Hell's Island only Celeste and Leef and Ngan Tai-Po.

And then, one morning, the American awoke to find a queer thing, a savagely beautiful thing, lying on the ground beside him. It was a club, and such a club! It was nicely tapered to the handhold, of red seraya, and was heavy; in the bigger fourth of it were set rows of gleaming white teeth, the hard, strong teeth of a monster sawfish. Leef knew this was the lugu-lugu. Ngan Tai-Po had made it; with it he had killed DeMontefort and Slæger and the original five.

At the sight of its red stains, dark red against pale red, the soul of George Leef came to revolt. He rose and took up the barbarous weapon, and he had no more than straightened when his ears caught the sound of a piercing scream from somewhere nearby. With the terrible club in his hand, he ran, and saw Ngan Tai-Po tearing through the jungle with Celeste in his great brown arms. Leef followed and struck down Ngan Tai-Po, the jungle-born and the godless, with the very weapon his own savage brain had devised.

The two who had survived faced each other. The man threw down the club and took the woman's slim hands in his.

"We were the strongest," she said, "you and I."

"Say, rather, that you were the strongest," smiled Leef. "You, the hyacinthine, the ethereal, the ultra-feminine. While I may have been the strongest one man, it is by your will that I live, your mate. But it is human love that is the survivor, Celeste. It was love that made you promise yourself in marriage to the cannibal man when he had killed all save me; it was love that made you steal the lugu-lugu club and then entice Ngan Tai-Po into a trap—oh, I have already guessed it all! But I do not blame you. Love had to survive, and there was no other way. This is in a great measure the history of the world, this that we have lived here..... We shall be happy now, for there is no longer a serpent in our Eden, my Eve. And if we are never rescued...."

A Visayan barote took them off a year later.

TROOPER McGowan fished a little school-teacher out of the lagoon one night and thereafter became quite mad. So did the little teacher. And the southeast wind, which was always more or less insane, chuckled as it recorded another victory. Look for this story, WHEN THE BAND PLAYS *by Helen Topping Miller,* in the August number.

THE UNSULLIED MIRANDA

BY MRS. DAVID A. WASSON

The skipper of the "Miranda" undertakes the task of making a record run without encountering a mishap to smear the ship's untarnished name. He soon learns that his crew is out for prize money, not a medal for deportment.

HE bark *Miranda* lay alongside the Ocean Shipping Company's corrugated iron warehouse in Charleston harbor, tapering yards a-cockbill, and deep with general cargo for Rio de Janeiro. Her topsides were shiny black adorned with a brilliant yellow stripe. Her iron work was dazzling with red lead; but the gloss covered a long year's toll of knocks and gouges, cemented seams and butts. The stripe showed what might have been in doubt before, that her sheer wasn't what it had been forty years ago. However, the *Miranda* had grown old gracefully.

President Gearing of the Ocean Shipping Company, and Captain Clear, the new skipper, stood surveying her from the wharf. President Gearing was tall and spare, slightly stooped and very gray. There was a sadness and wistfulness about his eyes, such as sometimes comes with years of introspection and dreaming.

"I want you to be good to her, sir," said President Gearing as his eyes rested affectionately on the bark, "for she's been good to us. The rest have forgotten the old girl's services, but I haven't. I am thankful sir, that I am not one to consign sentiment to the scrapheap at the bidding of utilitarianism. Oh, yes, they admit that she's been less trouble than most of her kind,—never a big repair bill, never a spar carried away below to'gallantmasts, never a crew unruly, never a blot on her escutcheon. But what does that amount to when she no longer can pay big dividends? Flowers and wine for her debut, but a wreath of smoke and grave waters for her decline," he added bitterly. "They wanted to make a barge out of her,—a barge out of the *Miranda!* They said there wasn't a real skipper left; that the men who could sail the *Miranda* to profit had long since gone the way of her sisters. They claimed that the very ocean she displaced was needed for the new craft. The company thinks I'm soft; in fact—well, I am a bit soft, and by George, sir, I pray I may always be just so soft! Are you a sentimental man, sir?"

The new skipper looked anything but sentimental. He was short and chunky, with an undershot jaw as blue as his shiny serge suit. His eyes were black and piercing, and his mumbling voice seemed to come from just beneath the massive gold watch-chain on his vest. He laughed shortly at the president's question and answered.

"No, I certainly am not, sir; but I guess I can keep her afloat and respectable."

"Have you a home, Cap'n?"

"I live at Cape Porpoise."

"H-m-m—well—er—the fact is, the *Miranda* was my home—the only home I can remember."

"She's a likely looking craft yet, sir," Captain Clear admitted.

"Likely! Yes, she's likely enough,—she's more than that, Cap'n; she's sacred to me,—sacred."

"That so, sir?"

"She is associated with the sweetest moments of my life," continued President Gearing. "I remember so well the day I brought my wife home; the *Miranda* was strung with flags and hung with lanterns from stem to stern. Ah, that was a welcome! Then she was fragrant with flowers the day our little son came to live

with us,—we were in Japan,—and fragrant too, the day she left there.

"It's hard sir, to be told that my old home is no longer worth manning. She's been out of commission for the past five years. Then, with the great demand for tonnage since the war, came a chance for the *Miranda*. It's up to her to make good. Pretty hard on the old lady to be put on probation at her time of life. At any rate, if she fails, she'll go down, sails set; and if she wins, or rather, by George, if the *Miranda* should happen to down anchor at Rio before that new five which was launched at Bath last month, there's five hundred dollars for the captain and a hundred apiece for the crew. Guess I'm feeling more than usually soft this morning."

They shook hands and separated. President Gearing hurried up the wharf and the captain went below.

Captain Clear sat down thoughtfully at his desk and stared fixedly at a large portrait of a woman which hung on the panelled wall. He was there when the steward rang the supper bell. He was there at midnight when the first mate notified him that the crew had come aboard. Presently he went silently to the fo'c's'le and among the heavily sleeping Jackies. Calmly, he searched them and theirs, tossing over the rail any bottles which he found.

In the morning, blond and strapping First Mate Mellody brought the despoiled and disgruntled huskies back to a cheerless universe with generous drawbucketfuls of salt water forcibly applied.

The sky was blue and fathomless, and between it and a deep indigo sea, whistled a ripping, white-capped nor'wester. To the mystification of all though, the *Miranda* hauled off into the harbor to make room for the next vessel on the berth and anchored. Perplexity grew into resentment. There was much grumbling among the men and guarded criticism by the mates. But the *Miranda* let the fair wind blow away for twenty-four hours.

"Skipper seems to have lost his pep somehow," remarked Mellody to Jones, the second mate.

All day Captain Clear puttered about with never a word for his mates. He bought a second-hand yawl-boat somewhere ashore and lashed her, bottom-up, beside the long-boat on the forward house. He dickered for a rusty anchor and chain and several spare sails in a junk shop on the waterfront, and carted them aboard in a lighter. Yet the *Miranda* was well-found in the first place, and supposed to have been ready for sea the day before.

"Ah reckon he jes' makin' excuses fo' not gwine sea on Friday!" surmised the cook, rolling his eyes.

Finally, he brought a carpenter aboard and had him knock up a mysterious cupboard in his stateroom.

"Medicine chest?" hazarded Jones to the first mate.

Mellody laughed. "What would he put in it,—smelling salts?"

Next daybreak, Captain Clear scanned the sky critically and ordered his crew to get under way. The men forgot their grievance in their eagerness to be off, and ran the mainland out of sight long before noon. The wind poured along with the ship, like an airy torrent, as she roared offshore. Swelling duck aloft pulled a horsepower per inch, and every piling surge boosted mightily. The sun fired a sapphire sea to the clear-cut horizon, and never a prettier day dawned out of the sky.

The mufflered and reefered members of the second dogwatch, Mellody's, were shuffling expectantly toward the warm fo'c's'le when the skipper hailed Mellody. The mate showed marked disapproval of the order he received and bawled:

"Don't be in such a sweat, you fellers, yer got to clew up the courses and royals before yer turn in!"

The men turned like stags at bay. "Ay tank skipper she bane fool!" observed a patient Swede, and the men climbed angrily into the rigging. But the captain only wanted to make sure of shortening sail before King Neptune shortened it for him. To all appearances, however, the jolly monarch was in one of his lightest moods.

An hour later, Captain Clear deftly dressed a grimy hand from which little Tad Mace had lost the nails while clawing at a shuttling royal. The little wretch was suffering cruelly, but there was not the slightest suggestion of reproach in the grateful look he gave the captain when the hand was neatly swaddled in an old napkin. Captain Clear was touched, for the rest of the men had shown in a thousand ways their utter contempt for their captain.

"Nasty job aloft, Tad," the captain smiled.

"Fierce, sir."

"S'pose if you'd been big enough you wouldn't have gone, eh?"

"You're the doctor, ain't yer, sir?"

A wistful smile played timidly about the deep lines of the captain's mouth as if it were trying to coax those old creases to relax in unwonted softness.

The men made a great uproar over Tad's accident, and cast many a vindictive eye in the direction of the captain. They treated Tad with unheard-of tenderness as a reproach to the author of his mishap.

"Jones," summoned Captain Clear.

"Sir?"

"Am I skipper here?"

"Why yes, sir."

"Then why all this sulking when I give an order?"

"The men think you're a little more prudent than necessary, sir; they don't like to go aloft at every puff, sir; and they blame you for Tad's getting hurt. He's the kid of the crowd, you know, sir, and we're all fond of him."

"Thank you, Jones. Er—one moment, Jones. Do you know President Gearing of the Ocean Shipping Company?"

"No, sir."

"Well, he's one of the finest old chaps I ever met—a great old chap. He asked me to be good to the *Miranda*—in a way that I never happened to hear a man talk before. I'm an old shellback, Jones, but what he said got under the skin—so, well—I am being pretty careful of the old *Miranda*."

Jones blinked and swallowed as if to aid his comprehension in grasping the significance of the skipper's strange confidence. He only answered, "Yes, sir."

The *Miranda* wallowed along under shortened canvas all night, and the surly crew made sail again in the morning. But that evening, after a splendid day's run, with not a cloud from zenith to sea-rim, Captain Clear called watches to take in sail. The northeast trades, strong and true, pushed the bark along at steamer time for days on end, but each night came the order to shorten sail, blow high or blow low. The men spent most of the time in the rigging, and the captain's popularity decreased steadily. Yet he was rather well known along the coast, and had always enjoyed the reputation of allowing nothing in the way of wind and sea to hinder him in the discharge of his duty to his employers. He was never known to show the white feather, and many were the tales of his daring.

Towards Tad and the second mate he had a warm feeling of friendship. Tad had refrained from joining with the men in denouncing his prudent policy, and he had overheard Jones offering excuses for the *Miranda's* slow trip. He had waited, breathless, to hear Jones relate his captain's sentimental confession; he listened with fascinated dread for the raucous outburst of Mellody's coarse laugh and the ribald hilarity of the crew. But, bless him, Jones had reminded them that the topsails were not so good as they used to be; that the quarter-mile long following seas might poop her in the night; that it was the hurricane season and they were getting into ticklish latitudes. Never did he allude to the captain's tender solicitude for the *Miranda's* precious old hull. How grateful he did feel to Jones.

One night, when they had hit the southeast trades and were clewing up after a brisk day's run, they spoke a vessel bound to Rio from Norfolk. The captain hailed the *Miranda* through his megaphone.

"How's the race?"

Mellody, who was at the wheel, answered.

"What race?"

"Heard you fellers were running for big stakes!"

Mellody replied that he didn't know what in —— he was driving at. Just then Captain Clear came on deck, and Mellody handed him the megaphone saying, "That fellow thinks we're racin'! He'd think we was regular cup defenders if he could see us tuckin' the *Miranda* in her little bed every night!"

The captain of the schooner persisted.

"They told us at Norfolk that old Gearing had put up a hundred apiece for you on the *Miranda*. How you making it?"

"Can't make you out," answered Captain Clear, and he turned to go below. Mellody gave the wheel to Jones and followed.

"See here, Cap'n," he said, when they had reached the cabin, "do you know anythin' 'bout the *Miranda's* racin' for big stakes?"

The captain was silent.

"We all thought you was runnin' a trainin' ship for lily-pad sailors; we didn't dream you was racin', honest!"

Captain Clear absently snapped the leaves of the log.

"Look's like you hadn't used us quite fair, Cap'n," began Mellody, on a new tack, for the captain's little eyes were smouldering.

He answered at length with maddening deliberation.

"That's a fact. President Gearing did offer a hundred dollars apiece to the men and five hundred to me if we docked before the Mary H. Brown, but he also—"

Mellody jumped to his feet.

"By Jupiter, there'll be the devil to pay and no mistake! A hundred apiece!"

"Yes, and five hundred for me."

"You! Rot! A hundred cold iron men you would cheat us out of! Bad enough to be drivin' the men into the riggin' every night an' tearin' the fingers off'n 'em, but when it comes to out an' out cheatin' them out of a chance to earn a little extra money—wow! I wouldn't be in your boots for a farm!"

The captain reached quickly into his desk drawer, and as quickly thought better of it. Mellody saw the action and strode on deck. "Look's so I'd made a mess of being good to the *Miranda!*" remarked Captain Clear to the gentle face in the portrait over the desk.

At two, when Captain Clear turned out to stand his watch, as was his invariable custom, the *Miranda* was boiling along under full sail. To his demand for an explanation, the patient Swede at the helm only shrugged stupidly and said:

"Mr. Mellody, she give order!"

"Oh, she did, did she?"

Captain Clear went below in a rage and yanked the slumbering Mellody from his bunk.

"How dare you disregard my orders, sir! This is mutiny!"

Mellody sprang; they clinched and staggered out into the cabin in locked embrace. For ten minutes they wrenched and swayed, rocked and strained, noiseless, with the exception of sharp whistling exhausts of breath and the padded scuffle of heavy feet. Gradually, Mellody's superior height and the captain's superior years began to tell. There was a splintering of furniture and a crash that shook the cabin. Mellody stood menacingly over the prostrate captain.

"Perhaps you call this mutiny too, Mister Clear," he gibed, as he helped the limping captain to a chair. "If this is mutiny, there's an ugly name for what you've done, too!"

"No, not mutiny," groaned the captain; "the Miranda has never had a mutiny. I'll turn in, I guess,—and you may give my order to keep the *Miranda* on her course day and night, under full sail!"

Next day, Captain Clear suffered from a badly wrenched knee and bruised shoulder, while Mate Mellody secretly nursed a tender joint or two. There was a certain crispness lacking in the captain's dignity, a new and jaunty insolence born in the mate's demeanor, and a half-suppressed exuberance in the faces of the crew. It was an accepted fact that Mellody was in command of the *Miranda*, the men in hearty accord, and the captain, in a pitiful minority, a helpless figurehead.

The *Miranda* labored over the long seas, rails under and snowy canvas belly-

ing. She seemed in a fair way to make up for lost time, and lent herself absolutely to the urge of the buffeting breeze, tossing her spray with joy at her rejuvenation.

In spite of the strangely reversed state of affairs aboard, Jones always addressed Captain Clear with his customary respect.

"Captain Clear, sir," he began, "Tad Mace has been laid up for a couple of days and I thought you ought to know, sir."

"You know just about how much good my knowing anything aboard this craft amounts to now."

"But something ought to be done, sir. The cook mixed him up some ginger, and I gave him a hot brick, but I think he's in mighty poor shape, sir."

"I'll go and have a look at him."

He found the lad tossing in his bunk, flushed with fever and pain.

"Let me press a little on your bowels, Tad," urged the captain.

"Ouch! Gee! No! You're murderin' me!"

"Murders you when I press so, does it? Hm-m!"

"Better keep yer hands off'n him, Clear," ordered Mellody. "He's stood enough from you already. We don't want no meddlin'!"

"Looks like appendicitis to me; 'tis just how she started with a fellow last trip," Captain Clear answered, ignoring Mellody's insolence.

"Well, what of it?" growled Mellody.

"I should say the boy ought to be put ashore. They have to operate mighty quick for that kind of thing—or—"

"Well, that's a cool proposition, now ain't it? Who asked yer to come pokin' around here, anyway? What kind of an old woman doctor do you think you are? Listen to him, Tad! 'Here boy, (he mimicked Captain Clear's attempt at a sick-room hush), let me press on yer bowels! Appendicitis! We'll go right ashore and have us an operation this minute!' Triflin' little matter—to go ashore! We ain't in no hurry! Yer bound to try and cheat us out of our money, any way we fix it, now ain't yer?"

Captain Clear flushed and looked from the derisive Mellody to lowering Lascar, and felt the boy's cheek with the back of his horny hand.

"Perhaps it would be a little too hasty, Mellody; perhaps it would," as he looked critically at the boy.

"Mellody," he said suddenly, "I'd like to see you alone—oh, any time, any time when it's convenient."

"What d'yer want?" demanded Mellody, when they were alone in the captain's stateroom.

"It's about the health of the men, Mellody,—I'm worried."

"Yer always worried, ain't yer?"

"We are in very unhealthful latitudes, and I think a little tonic would be a good thing for us all. We don't want all of us in little Tad's fix."

"The devil! No!"

"I've been on many more trips than you, Mellody, and I know we can take no chances with an epidemic among the men. Tad's case may be appendicitis and it may not be!"

Mellody paled slightly. "Do yer think there's a chance it's—"

"There's only one thing to do and that's to send the men to me for a dose of something which I brought on purpose." He pointed to the mysterious cabinet. "I'm sort of a quack on the side."

Mellody was impressed, and the men filed in, three at a time. First, big Joel Neilson opened a large bristly jaw to receive a tiny white pill, then the Lascar and Sam Whitman did the same; the Lascar gulped his gratefully, and Sam, preferring to accept his between reluctant thumb and forefinger, rolled it doubtfully until it seemed chocolate-coated.

They made room for the cook and Carl Hansen, followed by Mellody himself. Mellody laughed as he took his, but the others reached solemnly and greedily for the preventive offered. Next came a little yellow Frenchman, reeking of iodoform, and two stolid Swedes. The rest would report as soon as they were off duty.

Jones appeared alone as the last three shuffled out.

"Jones," said the captain, with his old

air of command, "give these pills, one each, to those two Cape Codders and the Porchegee. Tad doesn't need one and don't take one yourself. Come back here as soon as the Lord will let you!"

Jones returned, breathless.

"Aren't you going to give me a pill too, sir?"

"You shall have one if you want it, but first, how's Tad?"

"I think he's pretty sick, sir, pretty sick. I feel awful sir, awful about Tad."

"So do I, Jones; and we'll take him ashore,—you and I."

"Take him ashore, sir? How? The men would never stand for that sir, and Mellody—"

"Yes, Jones, I'm the captain and you're the crew!"

"And the men?"

"By this time they are about as harmless as a pack of school-teachers on their first voyage."

"Why, what do you mean, sir? You haven't—"

"No, I haven't. Those little sugar pills we have been passing around are the strongest individual doses of seasickness ever concocted. It is a drug known as apomorphine, harmless, but effectual. And who's afraid of a seasick crew? It may or may not interest you, but I was not afraid. It was on account of Mr. Gearing's giving me the *Miranda's* honor to preserve."

"Very good, sir; what are your orders?"

"First, we'll go on deck and inquire as to the health of our mutinous friends, then we'll see if we can get some of the muslin off so the *Miranda* will behave under her reduced crew."

The sight they met was a sorry one. Some of the men were doubled up and howling with pain; some were leaning pathetically over the rail, while others, including Mellody, were crisscrossed in the scuppers in a state of catalepsy. Neilson had dropped at his post,—a great sodden heap of misery. Jones grabbed the wheel.

"Here's your course, Jones," Captain Clear said briskly, as he gingerly stepped over the inert Neilson. "We'll head her for Pernambuco; there ought to be a hospital there. If Mellody crawls, give him this," and he handed Jones one of the fatal pellets. "I'm going to rig up an ice-bag for the patient."

Jones looked after the skipper with wonder and admiration struggling to shine in his lusterless eyes. Some of the men needed no second dose, but were dragged into the fo'c's'le as soon as the violent first stages had worn off and they were merely exhausted and helpless. Mellody was given a second pill as a matter of precaution. He hurled many a husky oath and promised many a rich retaliation, but his threats were accompanied by feeble gestures and puny attempts at belligerence.

Jones and the skipper stood watch and watch. The *Miranda's* guardian spirit hovered over her, conjuring a steady fair wind and soothing fractious seas. Captain Clear spent what few moments he could snatch from his numerous and varied duties, at the bedside of Tad Mace, ministering to his needs with a gentleness hitherto unsuspected by himself. He knelt occasionally in spite of a stiff knee.

The *Miranda,* even under the necessary shortened sail, made good time to Pernambuco. She might have been a derelict for all the activity visible on deck as she swung to anchor. At the sight of a tiny white pill, not at the point of a revolver, the crew were cowed into a complete surrender. And then the navigating of the six-hundred ton bark by the skipper and his second mate had stirred the depths of those stolid bosoms into something like respect. At any rate, when the captain told the crew to get their dunnage together and pile over the side into the waiting tug unless they wanted to swim, they begged to be allowed to stick to the ship.

Tad was hustled to the hospital, where the operation took place at once. The captain waited anxiously until a soft-footed nurse reported that the boy was coming through safely. He paid the bill in advance, tucked Ted's passage home under his pillow, and after taking an affectionate farewell of the semi-conscious lad, hastened back to the ship.

When they reached Rio de Janeiro, the *Mary H. Brown* had discharged her cargo

and returned in ballast. No allusion was made to this significant fact by the *Miranda's* weak and shaky crew. The *Miranda* was unusually fortunate in securing a return cargo of hides, and the home voyage was uneventful and tranquil.

President Gearing was at the dock to welcome them. Captain Clear gave him a hard grip, but couldn't quite meet the sad gray eyes of the other.

"I guess the *Miranda* isn't any too proud of this trip," he began. "We made a slow run, but here she is, safe and undefiled," he finished, with a half smile.

"I did want to see the old girl whip that five-masted upstart, but of course you had to take what you could get in the way of wind."

"Oh, we had a good enough chance,—it was my fault, sir." And then he told President Gearing of the *Miranda's* errand of mercy, omitting the episodes of the fight in the cabin and the white pills.

President Gearing listened intently to the tale of the *Miranda's* slowest trip on record and then looked proudly at her skipper.

"So you're not a sentimental man, sir?" he laughed.

"No, sir. 'Twasn't sentiment exactly; it was having that picture of your wife in the cabin that did the business. It's kind of softening, sir, to go shipmates with a face like that. I guess I came to understand about how you felt about the *Miranda*."

IN the August issue: THE CUP ON THE NAIL *by John Matter,* a story of a homesteader who affected a fighting mood every time a stranger within the gates failed to return his drinking cup to its appointed place on the right hand nail over the water bucket. Mr. Matter is the author of the story BIG BROTHER in this number. (See page 28.)

Another story for August will be THE MEANNESS OF PETE JERDO *by William Merriam Rouse.* It tells how the "meanest man in Curderville" became a hero by mistake and then decided to live up to his new reputation.

THE LOVE OFFERING

BY ALICE GORTON WYNN

A fugitive from justice, facing the prospect of a renewed acquaintance with jail bed and board, perfects an ingenious plan for providing for his wife and child during his absence from the home.

TALL, weather-browned man came striding across the the rice-field toward his little cabin. He wore a laborer's overalls with a red handkerchief knotted easily around his sturdy throat. A scrap of white paper fluttered in his fingers. He had picked it up on the main thoroughfare beyond the rice-field.

There was no circulation of newspapers among the simple Acadians of Bayou Queue-de-Tortue. Who had dropped it? The bold headlines of an article were torn from the remainder of the printed sheet. What the man read there blurred the glory of the noonday sun.

$1,000 *Reward for Reliable Information Concerning the Whereabouts of Helaire Lapine Fortenot—Believed Hidden Somewhere in Southwest Louisiana.*

He crumpled the fragment into a hard bullet with his strong fingers and trampled it into the damp loam.

He could see his small home just across the Bayou Queue-de-Tortue which lazily winds its sluggish way through evergreen savannahs. His wife, Zanette, was out under a catalpa tree battling the clothes of the week's wash. As she laid a folded wet garment on a bench and pounded it with a wooden paddle, her back and arms showed the soft roundness of a very young woman—almost a child. By her side, a two-year-old boy pounded imaginary clothes with a piece of shingle.

The man quickened his step at the adorable home scene under the catalpa. Zanette did not turn until he heaved the spade from his strong shoulder to the step. Then she danced to him with the grace and fleetness of a ballet artiste.

"Mon good Helaire!" she caroled between kisses.

The man swung the clamoring child to his broad back, but paid little heed to the baby prattle. A driven look was in his eyes.

"I have not time to eat now, Zanette. I'm going hunting back of the Jumonville place. I must hurry. Wrap me up some lunch, my angel."

"Dinner ready to take up, Helaire."

"It is far, Zanette. I must be going," he emphasized.

Helaire tried his gun and stored a supply of ammunition in his hunting-horn.

"I may be late getting back, Zanette. You and little René will not be afraid with your mother in the house. By-by, my sweet."

Zanette stood in the door and waved her hand and the baby's hand to him as he turned to look back for the third time. When he followed the curve of the road, and he could see them no more, a convulsion writhed across his features and left his face pinched and gray.

"O gentle Virgin," he prayed, "look down from Heaven in pity on the little mother and her child! I must leave them. Zanette will think no evil of me. She will think I am dead. She will grieve and she is so young, she may forget." He thought of the officers probably already on his track. The newspapers had surely been seen in Evangeline, a town seven miles away.

"Oh, my God," he groaned, "I served five years of my life behind the walls. Was not that enough? Must I slink around

once more like a beggar mongrel?" A look of desperate resolve ossified on his face as he fondled his weapon. "I'll die before I let them take me."

Helaire stumbled through the spikes of dwarf palmetto across the open prairie, never stopping to eat or rest until he had reached the cypress swamp, ten miles from home. He was thirsty. He had forgotten to fetch water. The ill-smelling marsh-scum sickened him.

In the middle of the morass, dim and dark, even in daylight, from the cordage of vines and low hangings of Spanish moss, stood a storm-bent tree, gaunt and spectral, raising dead arms toward heaven. He had noticed this tree before when hunting. In its hollow crypt Helaire stowed his food and ammunition. Walking to and fro on the upstanding cypress knees he gathered moss from the neighboring trees and prepared a pillow against which his pain-racked head could spend the night. Just before the dense blackness settled down, he saw a big moccasin snake coil itself on a limb above his head. He knocked it into the water with his gun before mental and physical exhaustion compelled sleep.

In troubled dream, he saw his father's sugar plantation on Bayou Teche in the parish of Terre Bonne. As a hovering spirit, he saw himself a wild scapegrace, a truant from school—a good-for-nothing. He heard his father express gladness that the boy's mother was dead and untouched by his wrongdoing. Helaire saw the boy, grown into a man, his hot blood fired by insult, shoot a comrade over a gaming table, and the murderer sentenced to distasteful labor behind prison bolts. His father's old coachman, now a priest's chauffeur, entered the penitentiary cell in his employer's stolen ecclesiastical robes and handed the incarcerated man a heavy file. Helaire awoke.

The night was soot-black, except during the fleeting pyrotechnics of heat-lightning which cut jagged streaks across the inky slush and showed the wind-swayed moss-ghosts dancing with locked, transparent hands. Helaire closed his eyes and eased his cramped body by climbing out of the hollow trunk into the tree-crotch and dangling his deadened legs.

He thought of his little cabin under the blossoming catalpa; the bayou in front, across which floated a pontoon bridge tangled in water-hyacinths, where the blue herons waded and fished. He had hoped soon to make enough money to buy a few acres of rice-land and to build a fitter home for Zanette—the little Arcadian girl whom he had met and married three years ago—Zanette, who combed her black hair in such mazy rolls, and whose skin was the cream of a new-blown magnolia. Their little boy, René, had his mother's curls, and eyelashes like raveled silk.

Zanette had never known unhappiness. She slept with a smile on her lips at night and waked with a song in the morning. She was very ignorant of the world. She thought him a pattern of nobility.

His poor shack of a home had been kept sweet and fresh. His tin lunch-basket excited the wonder of the other laborers at meal hours, for it showed rare touches of love and care. There was always a homemade napkin, and brightly polished pewter-ware; the bread was always light and the coffee clear.

Now he was deserting, and leaving her and the child to the extremity of poverty and distress; for the old bedridden mother had not the scantiest necessities of existence. Zanette's lustrous eyes would dim from hardships and her limbs grow misshapen with drudgery in the fields. If there was only some way to provide for her.

"Perhaps I could get the reward as I saw that miner do in the moving-picture show. $1,000 would keep Zanette, her old mother and the boy for a long time." Helaire covered his face with his arm to shut out the vision. "Back to the handcuffs and the bars! There is no other way, Zanette."

The gray morning crept in at last under the glooming cypress trees. Helaire swallowed a few mouthfuls of food and picked his way on the cypress knees out of the boggy slough. When he reached open, higher ground, he seated himself, searched an old notebook for a clean

blank leaf, carefully sharpened a pencil to a very fine point and began a letter. He imitated small, feminine handwriting.

"To the Sheriff of Evangeline,—

"My husband, Helaire Lapine Fortenot, will be at home this evening at eight o'clock. The house is under a catalpa tree, on the bayou road, opposite the pontoon bridge.

Zanette Fortenot."

A poor little smile twisted his mouth, for Zanette could not write the simplest sentence in English. She did not know his name was Fortenot. What did it matter, if she got the money?

Helaire folded the note and placed it in the notebook. It was the morning for the mail-rider to make his bi-weekly trip out from Evangeline to the post-office in the cross-roads store. Helaire had no acquaintance with the postman. He had not received a letter for three years. He made his way to the route of travel, waited for the mail-rider's appearance, purchased a stamped envelope, sealed and mailed the letter.

Helaire looked at the sun. By steady walking he judged he could reach home at seven o'clock. He wanted a little while with Zanette and the boy before he went away forever.

When he emerged from the strip of woods nearest his home, Helaire heard the whistle of the rice-mills in Evangeline bellow out the seven o'clock hour. He could see the little cabin under the catalpa sketched in amethyst against the brilliant shield of the setting sun. With his gun on his shoulder, he walked the distance in regular strides and vaulted the low fence. His need of food was faint compared with the love-hunger in his heart, but he must not frighten Zanette.

"Hello, Zanette! René!"

A joyous gurgle, a dash of swift feet, and two small forms were cuddling in his arms. Soft lips touched his face and neck in a dozen places.

"Oh, Helaire, de hunt was long to René and me. We lonesome. What you shoot?"

"Bad luck, Zanette. I walked all day and all night. Didn't find any game."

"Das terrible," she laughed. "My mouth it water for some deer meat."

"Has anyone been here, Zanette?"

He licked his cracked lips and cooled his aching eyes against little René's bare shoulder.

"Non," Zanette told him. "Saint Therise! You must be hongry, yes. Supper ready. I fix de gumbo nice."

Helaire sat up to the table with René on his knee and tightly held in the angle of his left arm. Almost unconsciously, he poured the gumbo and rice down his throat. Zanette flitted around the table and the stove, sitting on the edge of her chair to eat between flittings. Once, as she passed behind Helaire, she paused to give him a little kiss on the top of his head before skipping on to the cupboard.

"Some strangers will visit us tonight, Zanette," Helaire dragged out. "They will come about eight."

Zanette's eyes widened, mystified. "How come?" she asked.

"Their business is with me. They want me to go away with them and get a better job," he lied. "They will give you money —my pay in advance. You will be careful and use it until I come back. They will be mad if you ask them questions."

Zanette spun around on her tiptoes and trilled a little ditty. "Das fine!" she concluded. "I go put on clean robe, and René must be wash."

She paused on her way and a note of solicitude quavered through her speech. "How long you be gone, Helaire?"

"It may be some weeks before I can come for you and René. Just as soon as I can I will. You know that."

"Das all right, Helaire, but it is hard— me and René—separate from you. We think of not'ing else till you come."

An automobile speeded along the road down by the bayou. The long rays from the searchlights flared in and dimmed the little kerosene lamp. Helaire sat still, his muscles rigid, trying to hide his stunned despair.

A slight crunching of feet on rice-chaff, and a sharp rap sounded at the door.

Zanette answered the knock, René holding on to her dress with both hands.

"Entre," she invited.

Helaire arose, his face the color of a bleached bone, and advanced toward the two men who entered behind Zanette. His tongue and vocal chords felt paralyzed. The blood was beating at his heart like knife-stabs.

"Helaire Lapine Fortenot?" interrogated the foremost visitor.

Helaire nodded his head.

"Escaped from Baton Rouge and in hiding for three years?"

Helaire swallowed hard, trying to loosen the muscular tension in his throat. He was glad Zanette was getting chairs and did not understand. Again he nodded his head.

"I bear a document which concerns Helaire Lapine Fortenot, sentenced to the penitentiary for killing a man in the parish of Terre Bonne."

The officer held the paper before Helaire's anguished eyes. Helaire read a line and read it again. His eyeballs bulged in bewilderment. He took the sheet from the stranger's hand and slowly took in its message. His head whirled with intoxication. The blood leaped through his veins. It was a certificate of his freedom, from the State Board of Pardons, based on the peculiar circumstances of the crime, and the exemplary conduct of the prisoner while in confinement.

"Your friends obtained it for you," the officer informed. "It has been published in all the leading papers. Your people concluded that you were dead."

"Will you sit, Monsieurs?"

Zanette came, bringing two chairs.

There were no other seats except a homemade bench which had served at the supper table. Helaire sank on that, a great peace calming his soul and irradiating his features. René crept between his knees and burrowed into his breast with his curly head. Zanette sat on a footstool at his feet, her small brown hand on his knee.

"You see the happiness of Paradise, my friends," Helaire gloated.

"All will be pleased to hear of your new life," advanced the other man, who had not spoken.

Helaire bent and kissed his wife's forehead. "It is the little madonna has worked a miracle."

"I am a lawyer from Terre Bonne," the second stranger introduced himself. "I have other news for you, Mr. Fortenot. Since you have not seen the papers, you do not know that your father is dead?"

Helaire shook his head.

"His will leaves the estate to yourself and sister. We offered a reward for information concerning your whereabouts. We have been scouring the country to ascertain whether you were dead, or living, hidden in some remote region."

"The passenger train passes Evangeline at eleven. Can you go with us? The car is waiting."

Zanette anticipated his answer. "Oui," she dimpled. "Like you said, Helaire. We stay, René and me."

Turning to the lawyer, every feature eloquent with searching interrogation, she breathed, "He come back soon?"

"Just as soon as the business is settled," he assured; and added, "we will be ready to start in thirty minutes, Mr. Fortenot."

The two men went out to the automobile. Helaire followed and spoke in low tones to the lawyer.

"My return may be delayed. Can you furnish me a small amount of money to leave with my wife?"

"Of course; I should have thought of it." The attorney searched his wallet and handed Helaire a roll of bills. Helaire raced back to Zanette.

"Here is money the men advanced for you, Zanette. Use it carefully and it will tide you over until my return."

"You have so long name, Helaire. I not know you name Fortenot," puzzled Zanette. "I thought you just name Helaire Lapine."

"No man has daily use for three names, Kitten. I was christened Fortenot. Father Cohan, who married us, he knows the name Fortenot."

"It all happen just like you say, Helaire. You go to get the job. I receive money. Mon good Helaire!"

BIG BROTHER

BY JOHN MATTER

Hof could navigate a four-horse truck through crowded Chicago thoroughfares and pilot schooners of beer across the bar with equal facility. Naturally a man of his ability wasn't going to lose his head just because he happened to be more than forty-five minutes from Lake Street.

OF TAYLOR was finding life dull in the late afternoon. If life had been a knife, he could not have cut his finger with it.

"I couldn't nick hot butter," Hof soliloquized, bitterly. "I couldn't stab a jellyfish, I couldn't whittle potatoes, I couldn't rip water with it. My goodness, but life is dull. I was happy when I was truckin' down 'round Lake Street in old Chicago, Illinois, U. S. A., but I didn't have sense enough to know that I was happy; so the happiness didn't do me no good. And now that I'm homesteadin' on the Arctic Circle, I'm unhappy and I have sense enough to know it. But the knowin' don't do me no good."

The wind thrust across the Saskatchewan prairie and worried the corners of Hof Taylor's house so that the flimsy shack waved in petulance. The unhappy owner tilted his chair against a wall and braced his feet against the stove.

"Blow, you son of a hurricane," he continued. "Shove, and yank, and jerk, and whipsaw, till the cows come home. You can't put my fur on end. I come from a place where the wind is made and boxed up and sold, and I used to meet you on Lake Street when you was no bigger than a whiff. How'd you leave the folks in Chi, or didn't you leave none? I wish I was back there. I wonder who will win the jackpot in at Rancey's this evenin'. I wonder if any of the boys will ante for me and say, 'Good old Hof Taylor! Too bad the squirrels caught him. Went nutty over the beauties of farmin', he did, and the joys of fresh air, so he did. What do you know 'bout that?' Farmin'! All I've raised to date is biscuits, and they didn't raise far enough to stretch my jaws. Fresh air! I've seen all the fresh air that lives, and I don't care if I never sees more. Black coal smoke is what my system specifies. And my ears hanker for the twilight song of the elevated, and my feet ache for hot, spongy asphalt, and my nose itches for river ozone, and my eyes burn for the glad lights, and my hands smart for the heave of the reins when the team stands on their toes and swells into their collars. And oh, for a tub of suds! Oh, I'd trade my homestead for one Chicago pavin' block and throw in the blue sky. 'Home, Sweet, Home.' That's where this child wants to be. It's a grand song. I'll have a little on my mouth organ."

He drew a harmonica from his vest pocket and pressed it against his lips.

"Play, baby," he admonished. "Play sweet and low for your Uncle Hof. He's terrible lonely and homesick."

The instrument had time to respond merely to the extent of three bars, when a man's figure appeared in the doorway. The musician became aware of the figure by the shadow that filled the one room of his house. He returned the harmonica to his vest pocket and turned his head inquiringly.

"Come in and set down," he invited. "Are you a homesteader, too, poor fellow, or are you human?"

"Who, me? I never heard of homesteaders 'fore now. Come to think it over, guess I did read 'bout them somewhere, along with pollywogs and beetle bugs in some book dealing with the curiosities of nature. Me? I'm a rancher. That's my ranch, six miles down the coulee. You can see a couple of the buildings, if you step outside."

"I've seen 'em. They're the only things 'cept country to see in any direction whichsoever. I was thinkin' of prancin' down there right soon to investigate what them buildings was and who was in 'em."

"I've saved you the bother. Don't you farm none? That's what I thought homesteaders was for—to stick seeds in the ground and pull weeds."

"Farm? What'd I farm with? A knife and fork? Listen. You can sob on my shoulder. I spent half of my bundle of kale in St. Paul and Minneapolis on my way up here. It ain't fair to have two such big towns so close together, is it, now? And the other half I flipped in gettin' located on this homestead and buildin' this brown stone front and back. Since then, for two weeks, I've been settin' here caculatin' how big a fool I am. My 'rithmetic and all my patience was used up when you come passin' by."

"Where are you from?"

"The southwest corner of Lake Michigan. Get off and turn to the right and ask anybody. Hof Taylor by name; truck driver by inclination and profession. But as soon as harvest comes, I'm goin' thrashin' and make some money to start farmin'. What do you raise—muley cows?"

"Only on holidays. Week days I raise horses."

"Horses!" cried the homesteader. "Now you're beginnin' to take holt. My middle name is horse. I had a team, comin' five, three-quarter Percheron, that could snake two ton through any traffic that ever blocked State and Madison at noon on the day before Christmas and never slip a hoof. Five hundred, I took for them, and I kissed them goodbye. Soon as I salt down five hundred I'm goin' back, and if the lad I sold 'em to won't exchange 'em for half a thousand flat, I'll bale him in a wad and feed him for hay. And if he has let that team fall on the cobbles and skin their knees, why, I'll chop him up for chicken feed."

"My, how bloodthirsty!" remarked the rancher. "Can you ride?"

"Anything with four legs and a back. I rode over at the stock-yards for a couple of years."

"Ever do any horse stealin'?"

"No, I'm an honest man."

"No? Well, listen to my proposition just the same. My name is Dow Carpenter. You're new in this country and you don't know me. I came up here to your shack this afternoon to chase you out. I didn't wish no homesteaders playin' 'Home, Sweet Home' in my ear. I wants free range for my stock. I'm figurin' on grazin' cattle next year."

"All right. Graze tarantulas and billy-goats if you likes. You didn't chase me. What next?"

Carpenter gazed steadily at his host for several seconds, and the homesteader as steadily returned the look. "I wants the land for free grazin'," at length remarked the rancher. There was something approaching persuasion in his voice. "I don't see why homesteaders has to horn in on this rough grazin' land. There's plenty of better farmin' country up north."

"I don't know either, when it comes to knowin'. I just whirled 'round three times and lit here."

"You're the second one to light. Bye-and-bye, they'll be droppin' like ducks, if us ranchers don't do somethin'. Last year some fellow took up a homestead eight miles west of me. He didn't last long."

"What happened to him?" asked Hof Taylor. "Or is it unmentionable?"

"Probably so, to him. First, his barn blowed down; then some shortsighted person mistook his horses for antelope and shot 'em, and then his house burned one day when he was gone to town for grub. He sure had tough luck."

"What became of him? Did somebody with bad hearin' mistake him for a cockroach and poison the poor insect?"

"It would have come to that, but the miserable cricket left afore anybody could squash him; went back to his mamma, I reckon. He was too young, anyway, to run loose. Looked about twenty-one with no wisdom teeth cut."

"What was his name?"

"Harris, or Harrison, or some such like that."

"So you ran him out?"

"I ain't braggin'. I sort of coaxed him out."

"And you come visitin' today to sort of coax me out?" asked Hof Taylor.

"I come to size you up."

"How do I size?"

"Too heavy on your feet to run. But I think I can buy you out."

"How come you at that think? I ain't nothin' to sell, 'cept this hen-house we're reposin' in so comfortable. The land ain't mine yet, and won't be for three years. Think again and maybe you'll astonish me."

"You can sell your valuable services," stated the rancher. "If you can rope and bridle five hundred dollars and your fare to the southwest corner of Lake Michigan, you'd be willin' to go, wouldn't you?"

"Go? That ain't no word to use 'round me; I'd fly. Man, I can feel the pinfeathers on my arms already."

"You don't fancy homesteadin'; and I don't fancy homesteaders. If I show you an easy way to earn five hundred and return fare both of us gets what we wants."

"Proceed some more. You talk better'n patent medicine."

"Now, we're smoochin' long nice, knee to knee," said Carpenter, settling himself on the doorstep. "Ride easy, and I'll proceed. Listen. There's a bunch of horses down in Montana that I wants to drive up to my ranch. Owin' to circumstances beyond my control, it's necessary to do the drivin' at night and, furthermore, on a night like tomorrow night, when there's no moon. You understand the beauty of my conversation?"

"My brain is slower than molasses in January, but I feel a thaw arrivin'. Proceed some more still."

"It's fifty miles to the Montana line," continued Carpenter. "My ranch foreman and me start this evenin' at dark. The ranch hand I expected to go with us had the poor judgment to let a horse throw him yesterday as far as next week, and now he can't ride a rockin' chair. I need a third man, and I can't spare no more from the place."

"The thaw is sure arrivin' fast."

"We'll come by here leadin' a horse. You climb on top that broncho and travel with us. You're to ask no questions, but do as you're told, and keep a clamp on your jaw. Tomorrow we rest, and tomorrow night we herd the bunch north to my place. Two hundred and fifty dollars will be tucked in your garter as soon as the last animal is in my corral. In 'bout a month, there'll be another bunch needin' exercise at night, and another two hundred and fifty for your other garter. In the meantime, betwixt and between, you can ride range for me and earn your care fare. Think it over and let me know inside of ten minutes how you think."

"Ten seconds is nine two many," replied the homesteader. "I only know of one better business and that would be clippin' coupons with a band saw. But why stop at two little travelin' parties? I'm not special busy at this time of the year, and garters is cheap, and anybody who will pay me two dollars and fifty cents per mile for me to ride with them can start for Halifax and I'll enjoy followin' 'long after."

"There'll be only two ridin' parties and no more," replied the rancher. "Ridin' at night arouses curiosity, and I don't like to have myself talked 'bout. My feelin's are sensitive. Besides, I'm goin' into the cattle business this fall with some meat packers, and I won't have time for pleasure trips."

"But how do you know that I won't hurt your feelin's by talkin'?"

"I don't know, but I'm gamblin' you won't. Just like you're gamblin' I won't. If you did talk, after the trip, you would have just as much to talk yourself out of as I would. It works both ways, don't it? As for what I've said so far this afternoon, print it on handbills, if you feel that way, and pass the bills all 'round. It would be your word against mine, and you're a stranger on this shank of the prairie."

"One more question before I clamp my jaw and do as I'm told. Where's your affidavit that you'll pay me the two hundred and fifty simoleons when the last cayuse

is in your corral tomorrow night? My garter is stretched all out of shape already. Somehow, my curiosity gets the best of my good manners."

"I'll bring the money with me tonight, and you can put it any place you like 'round this mansion until you get back. Any place, just so you and me knows where it is."

"Real money? No check? Funny how lively my curiosity is this afternoon."

"Real money—bank notes. Which color do you prefer? Your ten minutes is up. Yes or no?"

"I'll try anythin' once."

"All right," answered the rancher, arising from the doorstep and taking up the reins that his saddled horse dragged on the ground as the animal cropped the grass in front of the shack. "Have the dishes washed by eight o'clock tonight. We'll be ridin' by shortly after eight."

"Must you be movin'? Well, so long. Looks like the sun would set in the west this evenin'. Hurry back."

Herb Essley, foreman on the Carpenter ranch, was washing his russet-tanned countenance from a tin washpan on the sill of the bunkhouse in preparation for his supper, when the proprietor rode around the corner of the barn and dismounted. Soap suds covered Herb's face and he could not see. He turned his head and reached blindly for the towel.

"Dow?" he inquired.

"No," answered his employer, approaching. "This is Santa Claus."

"I didn't hear no sleigh bells and it's a long time till Christmas." Herb rubbed his visage vigorously, and one eyebrow appeared above the soap line. "Did you run that homesteadin' fellow back where he belongs?"

"Run nothin'," answered Dow Carpenter, testily. "That fellow has locmotor aphasia of the brain and hind legs. He wouldn't run to a fire." The rancher kicked the bunkhouse disgustedly. "He wouldn't run from sizzlin' dynamite."

Herb rubbed again and a second eyebrow appeared. "What you goin' to do 'bout that homesteadin' prairie wolf? Pretend you don't see him when you pass each other on the way out to pick wild flowers of a mornin'?"

"I'm goin' to take him with us tonight."

"What?" cried Herb, opening his wide big eyes and with a howl of pain promptly closing them. "Wait a minute till I can look you over and determine what brand of tanglefoot that homesteader poured you." He rubbed briskly and at length opened his eyes. "You never was much of a snifter, and even now your headlight don't seem blazin' bright. Where does this idea catch you worst, or can't you say? Tell it to old Doc Essley and he sure will write you a prescription in plain English. Snort out the idea."

"It's this way, Herb," began the rancher. "I'm gettin' cold feet clear up to my knees concernin' this Montana trip."

"We've done the same, identical thing in the past, and the damage was nothin' or less. It's a cheap way of acquirin' horses, and I admires my percentage of the gate receipts; so does the two lads in Montana. What we have done once, I reckon we can do again. Them's my sentiments."

"True enough, we've pulled the trick afore, but every time we makes the play our chances are taller, heavier and wider. This deal is all set and I'll play it out. The two boys across the line has the horses up against the border waitin' for us. We'll start tonight—"

"Good! You're shoutin' now."

"And after tonight, I'm through. It's gettin' too dangerous—harder for our men to land jobs on the big Montana ranches, harder to sell horses. The owners down there are countin' heads more careful and makin' certain every young animal is branded. Also, they're lookin' more critical at brands horses has already. Maybe they don't actually know they've been losin' some of the young horses and maybe they don't know they've been losin' them this direction. Maybe they're just on the verge of beginnin' to wonder. I don't know, but I knows this: after the deal tonight, I goes into the cattle business and I goes straight. Do you travel with me?"

"The straightest way is the shortest way

home," mused Herb. "I ain't no home but this. I travels straight if you do. Farewell, big gate receipts."

"Farewell," echoed Dow Carpenter.

"This homesteadin' badger, how does he cut into the pie?" asked the foreman. "I ain't ever asked him to pull up a chair. I ain't even seen him. What's his name, or ain't he named?"

"Hof Taylor, so he said."

"What did you make such a pet of him, for? He must have purred and rubbed your shins."

"You remember that young homesteader, Harris or Harrison, or whatever his name was, that we run off last year? You remember he made no holler? He just disappeared. But there was talk up and down the trail to town. It ain't in the nature of things for a man, even a cussed homesteader, to have his barn blowed over, his horses shot dead, and his house burned down, all in six weeks. Some folks sort of looked our way inquirin'-like—"

"Let 'em look. It will do 'em good."

"It didn't do our reputations special good."

"My reputation ain't ailin'. You can't keep folks from thinkin'. That's what they believe brains is for. But they think twice and repeat afore they talk once whenever I knocks on the front door. Concernin' this here homesteadin' caterpillar—did he blight your reputation?"

"No, not as I noticed. I don't intend that he will. He has a snoutful of homesteadin' this very minute. He's blowed his money paid him for a truck team. All he wants now is carfare and five hundred dollars to buy back his team in Chicago and he will hasten to where he belongs."

"If you're startin' a subscription list for homesick homesteaders, pass right on and try the next house. I'm powerful short today, and the rent is due, and the children need new shoes, and the missus wants a—"

"I wouldn't subscribe to a new rope to hang him with," asserted Dow Carpenter, "but I'll have him caught ridin' a horse that don't belong to him."

"How so?"

"Leave that to me. And leave to the Montana ranchers the merry little fact that they will make life interestin' then for our homesteadin' friend. And while that is proceedin', you and me will be back here sleepin' quiet and peaceful. He won't never return to bother us."

"How so, once more?"

"I told him I was short a man to make this trip tonight and that I would pay him two hundred and fifty to go with us. Also, that I would pay him the same to make a second trip with us a month later, and that he could chore 'round in the meantime and accumulate his car-fare to Chicago. He grabbed like a coyote at a roosting hen. You and me ride by his place tonight, leadin' a third horse for him,—Baldy, the sorrel."

"Baldy, the sorrel!" ejaculated Herb Essley. "Why, that mangy runt can't carry a full-grown man to Montana and back. He can't carry his tail up that far. He will go lame afore we are half way to the line."

"I'm countin' on Baldy goin' lame. If he isn't limpin' by the time we hit the border, I'll trade mounts with the homesteader and make the sorrel lame."

"But I don't see—"

"You ain't paid to see, think, or smell. You're paid to do what I tell you to do."

"Is that so? Do you mind if I sneeze now and then, Mister High Horse?" returned Herb Essley.

Two hours later, the rancher and his foreman rode to the homesteader's shack. Dow Carpenter dismounted, and leaving his companion outside, opened the door without knocking. Hof Taylor, with chair tilted against the wall and feet braced against the stove, was devoting himself to music. His hat was on his head, and his coat was on his back.

The rancher closed the door and remarked, "How high can you count?"

The homesteader finished the chorus of "Home, Sweet Home," and carefully tucked the harmonica into a vest pocket before he replied, "Fingers, or pencil and paper?"

"Suit yourself," answered Dow Carpenter, tossing a package of bank-notes into the other's lap.

"Pretty, pretty," said Hof, smoothing the contents upon one knee. "Now, let's see if you and me speak the same kind of 'rithmetic." He counted the bills slowly. "Grand total, two hundred and fifty dollars, and no cents. Correct. Where shall I hide this legacy?"

"Hide it where you please. Get action; we're due to be movin'."

"How would this suit?" asked the homesteader, stuffing the bank notes into an empty baking-powder can, and raising a short section of board from the floor beneath the stove, disclosed a hole dug in the ground. "After you left this afternoon I spent one hour of my valuable life preparin' this safety deposit vault."

"Good enough. Slap in the can and cover it with dirt and put back the board."

"There we are," replied Hof Taylor, when the orders had been fulfilled. "And now you and me has a secret between us. Ain't it sweet to have secrets between you and me?"

Three horsemen rode south through the night. One was short and one was tall and one was neither short nor tall. They rode in single file for miles across the open prairie and not one addressed another. At midnight they struck a trail that angled southwest.

"Fair time," said the short man, drawing rein. "We're half way there. Everybody happy?"

"I ain't," replied the tall man; "neither is my horse. I suspicion that he is thinkin' 'bout goin' lame. He told me three miles back that I was too heavy for him. He didn't have nobody else to talk to and neither did I."

"Don't you believe anythin' that broncho tells you," advised the man who was neither short nor tall. "I've rode him a hundred miles between sunup and sundown."

"You mean it seemed like a hundred miles to you. This cayuse wouldn't go a hundred miles for a carload of oats. He told me so two miles back. I didn't ask him; he just up and told me."

"Tell him to keep travelin'," said the short man. "We can't have no lame brutes in this outfit. Come on."

"Hear that, little horse? Be reasonable and mind your boss."

One hour later, the tall man remarked, "This horse ain't the least bit reasonable; he's done gone lame."

"Bad?" asked the short man.

"Tolerable, I should say. He told me just now he was good for somethin' like ten miles if necessary."

"It's necessary, and no mistake. Ten miles more will put us close to the border. You can walk the rest of the way."

"I don't like to walk," wailed the tall man. "Be good, little horse, be good to your Uncle Hof."

The little sorrel did his best, but Hof Taylor dismounted within half an hour.

"As I said, I don't like to walk, but I'd rather walk than ride this cripple," he stated.

"I don't believe you know how to ride," stormed the short man. "What'd you let the sorrel go lame on you for? You told me you could ride anything with four legs."

"So I can, Boss Carpenter, but this here animal only has three legs and a half. Get me a four-legged critter and I'll show you."

"I will as soon as we meet the other boys. You'll have to walk there. Come along this trail as fast as you can. It will be daylight inside of three hours and by that time we all want to be under cover. Listen to me, now, and get this straight, my homesteadin' friend."

"I'm listenin' with both ears."

"Follow this trail and within two hours you will cross a stream. You are over the border then. Soon you'll come to a fork in the trail. There's a scrub willow in the fork. Take the right-hand trail and keep travelin' till you start down into a coulee. That'll be 'bout three miles further on. Watch for us in the coulee. You understand?"

"Plain as plain."

The rancher and the foreman cantered on through the darkness; the homesteader, afoot, and leading the limping sorrel, proceeded to follow.

"Little horse," mused Hof Taylor, "I smell a mice. But whether it's a field mice,

house mice, white mice, grey mice, or bob-tailed mice, I can't tell to you, and I can't tell to myself, either. For why did they give me you to ride? Not that I has anythin' personal against you; not that, at all. You're a nice, sober little cuss so far as you go, but you don't go fifty miles to Montana with your Uncle Hof strad-dlin' your back. I knew your shoulder was off the minute I set in the saddle, and I knew you was goin' lame this side the border. I wonder if my friends down the trail knew as much as that? They looks like smart men. For why did they make you and me acquainted? Howsomever that may be, I don't regret that they did, for I'm interested in willow trees and I hates to admire them with a crowd of two or more hangin' 'round. I don't mind your bein' present; I don't mind you in the least; you and me is comrades in misery. It's my unsolicited opinion that walking through this cave of a night is a gritty way of earnin' two hundred and fifty. Speak up, Baldy, and tell us what you think 'bout all this."

The sorrel did not answer, but continued to limp philosophically along behind the tall man. In time they came to a stream.

"I hates to ride you across," remarked the homesteader, "but I hates worse to have my feet wet. I may be compelled to do some sprintin' within the next twenty-four hours, and I sprint best in dry socks." He mounted the sorrel and rode through the water, dismounting when the opposite bank was reached. "Here we are, on the trail again, and no damage done your shoulder, I trusts. That willow tree in the fork ought to be showin' soon. Come along, Baldy."

The tall man found the tree a quarter of a mile down the trail.

"Somethin' tells me," he ruminated, "that there's a hole in the right side of the trunk of this tree, 'bout six feet from the ground where a limb has broke off. Sure as you live, Baldy, here's the hole. It would make a ripsnortin' place to hide a little note in. And here's a little note all writ and in my vest pocket where I keeps my harmonica. That's coincidence. Always make the best of coincidence, Baldy; don't you forget that. Supposin' I just shove this little note in this here little hole and we goes on our way rejoicin' and sees what happens? You wouldn't tell nobody, would you? And you haven't objections, have you? The ayes win. In goes the note. Come on now, Baldy; we mustn't be late arrivin' at the coulee. Your boss was snappish the last we saw of him, and I don't propose to let his disposition curdle and me be to blame. Him and I has a secret, and you and I has a secret. I'd rather have a secret with you Baldy, than I would with him."

The first silver of daylight was streaking the eastern sky when the tall man and the sorrel horse descended the bank of the coulee. Half way across the flat bottom a whistle smote the pedestrian's ear from the left of the trail. He trilled a bar of "Home, Sweet Home," and turned to the left.

Herb Essley arose from the ground to greet him with, "You're a long time comin'."

"I don't wear spring-heels and one of my corns is hurtin' me powerful. What's the menu now?"

"Follow me."

"More walkin'? My contract didn't mention walkin'; it said I was to ride. Pretty soon I'll be lamer than this little horse and then I'm liable to set down on you and cry. Where's that new horse the boss promised me?"

"Over here in a clump of willows. Make your feet twinkle, corns or bunions. We've got to drive that herd farther off from the trail before daylight comes, and it's comin' fast now."

As they approached the willows, Dow Carpenter rode forth, leading a horse by a rope.

"Here's your new broncho," he informed the homesteader. "Throw your saddle and bridle on him quick. We're goin' to take the herd a ways down the coulee. You follow along behind and don't let any stragglers past you."

"How many are we?"

"Two lads who brought up this herd, and us three who rode here tonight."

"I walked part way. Don't count me a whole one."

"I'm worried 'bout the other two boys and the second bunch of horses," continued the rancher. "We ain't seen a sign of them yet, and they ought to have been here long ago."

"Maybe all their critters went lame," suggested Hof Taylor.

"They must have been late startin'. We can't wait here any longer. Are you ready?"

"What'll I do with Baldy?"

"Turn him loose. He will edge in with the others."

"Goodbye, Baldy. Whoa, there, you great, big stepladder! Let your Uncle Hof climb aboard. He's kind to dumb animals, but he don't like 'em too dumb."

In the light of dawn, the five men drove the herd of young horses east along the coulee bottom. Herb Essley rode beside his employer.

"The lads tells me," he vouchsafed, "that the ranchers down here has a reward posted of five hundred dollars for information leadin' to the apprehension of certain unknown parties—or some such words. How would it be for you and me to tell on each other and split the reward?"

"Most pleasin'. Try it and see."

"I can see it without tryin'," said Herb Essley. "The two lads also tells me that the ranchers of this section are ridin' range freely, on the lookout for them unknown parties; with blood in their eyes."

"That so? All the better. This here homesteader, whose corns hurts him, thinks there's two more men to join us with another bunch of horses. I led him on to think so. 'Bout five o'clock this afternoon I'll send him out to hunt the other men and find what the trouble is. He won't find the men, but I'm expectin' he will find the trouble. I'll give him orders to ride south fifteen miles and look 'round. That will put him onto the Lazy Y ranch. Probably he will stop afore he gets that far—stop by request of some of the Lazy Y men. And he will be ridin' a Lazy Y horse, which fact will be interestin' for him to explain."

"His explanations may interest us."

"How so? By dark we'll start north with our herd. Not a branded animal, except what we rode down, goes back with us. I warned the boys that last time that I wanted no more branded horses included. I suppose they slipped some in, havin' the same thirst for gate receipts as you has. If they did, every brand comes out, and the two boys who brought them up here can start them south this evenin'. By the time this homesteader can bring our name into his conversation with the Lazy Y men, we will be across the line. By this time tomorrow, we will be back on the ranch and there won't be a brand there that don't belong there."

Several miles farther on they came to an opening in the north coulee bank.

"Drive 'em in," called Dow Carpenter, and the forward riders turned the straggling herd toward the opening.

Hof Taylor, bringing up the rear, was the last to enter. He found a corral designed by nature. "Some barnyard," he muttered to himself, watching the horses scatter over the half section of land in the blind coulee and begin eager grazing. "Some barnyard; only the gap has to be watched."

Herb Essley was busy with willow branches and matches. "Green wood and hard to start goin'," he said. "Coffee and bacon for breakfast. Can you drink your coffee black?"

"The blacker, the stronger," replied the homesteader. "And I certainly need strength. My corns are worse than the evil of temptation. After breakfast I'll have a sleep, if there's nothin' better to do."

"You'll have your turn guardin' the gap," said Dow Carpenter. "After that you can drop dead if you want to."

"If you give me the first watch, I'll try to oblige."

"It's three-thirty now. I'll take the first trick from four to six, 'cause I hates to miss my rest. Herb can have from six to eight for the same reason, only more so. You can have from eight to ten."

"Then at ten o'clock," replied Hof Taylor, "all I'll suffer just to disoblige you, will be a stroke of paralysis."

At ten, however, he lay down and promptly went to sleep. At four o'clock he was awakened by the rancher's hand upon his shoulder.

"Get up. We need you."

"I knew you would," answered Hof.

"The other herd hasn't come in," continued the rancher. "Somethin' has delayed the boys. We have to start north at dark. I want you to ride south fifteen miles or so and look 'round. If you run across the boys, tell 'em we're here waitin', and if they can reach here by dark to keep comin', but if they can't make it, tell 'em to turn their horses loose and go back. Whether you find the boys or not, return here by dark."

"That's some ride, with fifty miles ahead of me tonight, and my corns still jumpin' up and down."

"You said you could ride; I never said you could. There'll be a fresh horse for you tonight."

"I'll do it to oblige you," replied Hof Taylor, "'cause I admires you so much. Any grub handy?"

"Cold bacon and hot coffee. Help yourself."

A few minutes later, Hof Taylor rode out of the natural corral into the coulee. He crossed the bottom and climbed the opposite bank, and continued south. For half an hour he rode, then halted and looked at his watch. "Five o'clock," he said. "I'll loaf a while, and then by the time I gets back there, things ought to be just 'bout beginnin' to happen." He drew the harmonica from his vest pocket and devoted himself to "Home, Sweet Home." It was his intention to play for fifteen minutes, but he found the charms of the melody so compelling that the half of an hour went by before he sighed and glanced at his watch. "Sufferin' smokestacks!" he exclaimed, and hastily galloped in the direction from which he had come. As he approached the coulee, he slowed his mount to a walk, cautiously drew near the bank and peered over. Below, he saw something that caused him to ejaculate, "Things has happened!" and to ride quickly down the slope.

The herd of horses was being driven west along the bottom. Four men, whom Hof recognized as his former companions, followed in single file. Their arms appeared to be bound tightly to their sides. Behind the four came six strangers.

"Your name?" asked the leader, as the homesteader drew rein alongside.

"Hof Taylor."

"You look the description. Prove it."

With a smile, the homesteader drew the harmonica from his vest pocket and played "Home, Sweet, Home."

"Here's a check for five hundred," said the leader, tendering a slip of paper. "It's made out to you. Are you ridin' our way?"

"Thanks, no. I've a rendezvous at a scrub willow in the fork of a trail;—a rendezvous with a fellow named Harrison and a bakin' powder can that comes out of a hole under a loose board; eh, Carpenter?" The homesteader winked, but the rancher did not return the salute. "I guess I'll have to change horses for that sorrel over there that's limpin'. This critter don't belong to me."

"Don't bother," said the leader. "Keep the horse you're on. He's mine, and I gives him to you."

"Thanks, once more. Any word for Harrison?"

"Say goodbye for us again. He was a good ranch hand. I hates to lose him. I reckon he's headin' East as soon as he meets you."

"East is the word for him and me, too," replied Hof Taylor, gathering up his reins. "Well, so long. Oh, yes! I most forgot somethin' I wants to tell my boss. You may be glad to know Carpenter, that Harrison is a friend of mine. Fact is, he's a relative of mine. Wanted excitement and run away from home;—changed his name. I'm glad he did, if he had to be tripped up by a tumbleweed like you. And now I meets him and the aforesaid bakin' powder can at a scrub willow in the fork of a trail not so many miles away. Yes, it was all arranged by a little note. You see, I'm his big brother. Ask Baldy, the little sorrel horse. I told Baldy all 'bout it."

Dow Carpenter said nothing, but continued to stare upon the ground as the cavalcade moved forward.

UNMASKING CLEO

BY FRANK X. FINNEGAN

Cleo was the doctor's prescription. He was to be taken either before or after meals in doses of two hours' duration. He was a good horse, but not so good that one could shake him well before using and have anything left to saddle.

BRANTWOOD insisted that I should go with him to help in buying the horse. That is how I got into it. I had plenty of my own affairs that required attention and, more than that, as I frankly told him, I know only one point worth while about horses—some are trotters and some are pacers. Aside from this distinction an animal might have spavin, ringbone, hives, heaves and all the other cavalry discomforts without me being a whit the wiser. But these striking facts did not influence Brantwood in the least.

"I want you along so I shall have a witness to what this fellow says about the horse, in case I have to take him into court," he said. "I don't expect any trouble, but he might exaggerate. Of course, I'm not going to ask your opinion about the animal. I was raised on a farm and I ought to know something about horses."

I was bound to admit that he had me there. The things Brantwood ought to know about make up too extensive a collection for anyone to decide upon its limitations; but I hoped it might not be too late to rescue him from the mendacious horse-trader.

"Anyhow, what on earth are you buying a horse for, in this generation?" I asked. "Everyone I know, who can't afford it, is buying a touring car or a runabout, and those with marked homicidal tendencies are going in for motorcycles. Yet here you come trailing along at the tail-end of the procession, talking about buying a horse. What's the idea?"

He looked at me coldly. A sensitive soul would have suspected rebuke in his manner, but it glanced off me like criticism off a Murphyized nerve.

"I'm not doing this to be eccentric," he said. "You know well enough that I'd have a car if I had the time to spend in court and the money for the fines. This horse was wished on me by Doctor Mœbius. He looked me over a week ago and prescribed a long, slow ocean voyage. I convinced him that he had got track of the wrong Brantwood when he was looking me up in Bradstreet's, and he compromised on a saddler. I'm to ride two hours a day."

"If the horse will permit you to do so," I suggested.

"That's the sort of a horse I intend getting," Brantwood declared, with as much enthusiasm as his Plymouth Rock nature ever exhibits, "and this man Maiwurm tells me he has just what I want. Come along, before someone slips in ahead of me and gets it."

When we met Maiwurm in the reception hall of his livery stable I immediately decided that he was an object of suspicion. He had sage-green whiskers and one of his eyes was of such a roving, rollicking disposition, that he could not fix it on anything definite for more than a second or two at a time. It suggested that he might have been born in one of those lighthouses with the revolving lamps they have down near Sandy Hook. He welcomed "Branty" with too much cordiality, and looked me over coldly. Something seemed to tell him that I belonged to the opposition.

"How's the horse?" Brantwood genially inquired.

"I've had a time keepin' that horse for you," he wheezed through the emerald

furze. "There was a fellow seen one o' my men exercisin' that horse out here yesterday and he come in to me with a hundred and twenty-five dollars, cash money, and offered me it for that horse. But I told him it was as good as sold to you, and I never went back on my word when once I passed it."

This sounded encouraging. If the horse was only half as honorable as Maiwurm admitted himself to be, Brantwood would have a chance.

"That was good of you I must say," he declared. "When I make up my mind to have a thing, I don't like to see some other fellow get it first. He went away pretty mad, I suppose."

"Well, he paid me a deposit on the horse in case you wouldn't take it," Maiwurm declared, and I could tell by the roll of his wandering eye that a leaning toward fiction was a dominant trait in his temperament."

"Let's see the horse," I suggested. "I have matters of importance pending in the busy marts of trade."

Mr. Maiwurm ogled me for an uncomfortable second or two, and then shouted an order to the lower regions of his stable. After a little while, during which interim Branty nervously examined prints of sporting gents in red riding coats being tossed over fences by 'unting 'orses that had refused to jump, a dejected hostler crawled into our midst, leading a mild-eyed horse with high, intellectual hips and a permanent air of surprise.

His nigh foreleg had a jaunty curve to the rearward, that was strangely absent from his other members, and as I walked around to diagnose it, he seemed to eye me reproachfully.

"What do you think of him?" Brantwood inquired anxiously.

"I think he would look better to the naked eye if he were re-upholstered," I ventured, "and something might be done by an expert to take the spring out of his leg. It looks to me as though this animal might have run away from home to join a circus in his earlier days and had practiced standing on one foot. His weight was too much for the leg."

"He wasn't never in no circus!" Maiwurm retorted indignantly. "This here is a gentleman's saddler!"

"That leg *is* a little off, isn't it?" Brantwood admitted. "Still, you often see a horse whose legs aren't exactly mates. That isn't so bad if they sort of work together, you know."

He stepped around in front of his prospective mount, and the horse sighed heavily into his shirt bosom. Branty drew back in alarm.

"How about his habits? Does he bite or kick?" he demanded.

Mine Host Maiwurm turned on him a wavering glance that was intended to express grieved surprise at this insinuation. If he had raised the horse on the bottle and personally attended to its early training he could not have been more hurt.

"Bite? This horse? I should think not!" he retorted. "I wouldn't sell you no horse that bites! And the only time he kicks is when he doesn't get oats enough," he added, with a playful wink at me, which closed down the lighthouse beam temporarily.

"In that case," I interposed, hooking an arm jauntily over one of the handy hipbones, "I should judge that his life has been one long tango."

Brantwood frowned his disapproval and patted the nag affectionately on its throbbing thorax, having evidently forgiven the wrecking of his shirt front. He was beginning to pine for action.

"Well, trot him up and down. Let's see him move a litttle," he suggested. "I want to watch his knee action."

"All right," Maiwurm said, almost cheerily. "Take him out, Joe. Give him a good, lively trot. This is a horse that's got lots of action, too," he assured us.

The dejected hostler awoke with a start. It was cruel of his brutal employer to bring him back to the workaday world so suddenly.

"Come on, Cleo," Joe said, tugging at the halter strap. "Giddap! Click, click, click!"

"Wait a minute!" I interrupted. The horse was perfectly willing to do so. Joe showed equal enthusiasm about postponing

the exercise and became rooted to the spot.

"Do I understand that this horse's name is Cleo?" I demanded.

Maiwurm's roving eye traveled rapidly in my direction.

"Yes, that's his name," he said. "What of it?"

"There's only one thing for you to do if you buy this horse," I suggested, turning to Brantwood. "You'll have to get him a pink saddle and a baby blue bridle or else have him christened over again. In fact, I think the latter plan would be better. You can't expect to call a horse 'Cleo' in front of a self-respecting park policeman and get away with it."

Brantwood looked at the three of us for a moment as though the suggestion were highly disturbing. Then he shrugged his shoulders and motioned to the ennuied hostler to proceed with the demonstration.

"Oh, come on!" he said testily. "Let's see what the horse can do. I'll call him Bill if I want to. Get him outside, Joe."

Thus admonished, Joseph leaned once more against the strap, and it was borne in upon Cleo that his vacation was about to be interrupted. He clicked his ribs together sharply and shook his head at the hostler in violent negation of the suggestion, but Joe continued to heave until the horse grudgingly moved across the stable floor and into the street. There he paused to look around the neighborhood, ignoring the efforts of his guide to lure him down the street.

"What's the matter? Why doesn't he trot along?" Branty demanded.

"I think he is acquainted with the family over the way and he is trying to see whether anyone is at home," I suggested.

"He's just lazy a little—feedin' too well and not doin' any work," Maiwurm explained. "I'll start him."

He brought a whip from the office and approached the ennuied saddler with determination flashing from his good eye. At the same moment, Cleo caught the idea and started down the block so impulsively that he left the hostler two lengths behind at the quarter, and was still going strong when Joe overtook him. They made the turn at the end of the street without an upset and on the trip down the home stretch we had an opportunity to observe the knee action that had been worrying Brantwood.

"Doesn't he raise his hind legs a bit high?" he wanted to know. Maiwurm had been expecting the question and he was ready for it.

"No, no. He got that from being trained to saddle work on country roads where he travelled in soft mud a whole lot," he explained. "I sort o' figure he lifts his feet that way to shake the mud off 'em."

"If you will both pardon the digression," I interposed, "I was once personally acquainted with a horse that put in seven years as assistant to a house-mover. His share of the work was to walk around a windlass ten or twelve hours a day and step over a rope every round trip. In the course of time that intelligent animal learned to lift his feet so high you couldn't trip him on a telegraph wire. Has Cleo ever been connected with the house-moving industry?"

The livery man was composing what would doubtless have been a withering retort, when Joseph arrived with the horse, both breathing hard and willing to call it a day right there and knock off work.

"Well, what do you think of him?" Branty asked me when Cleo was posing for us again, his curved front leg showing to splendid advantage against the red brick of the livery wall.

"I don't mind telling you frankly, right here in front of Mr. Maiwurm," I said. "If you are convinced that horseback-riding would be of benefit to you, I don't think you could invest twenty-five dollars to better advantage than by buying this horse."

Maiwurm grabbed at his necktie.

"Twenty-five dollars?" he yelled. "Why, this horse is worth a hundred and seventy-five dollars, just as he stands!"

"That may all be," I admitted, "and the way he stands certainly has its unique points. I wouldn't pretend to say what Cleo might be worth from your point of

view, Mr. Maiwurm. I was merely telling Mr. Brantwood what I thought he ought to pay for the animal. And as far as the way he stands is concerned, I wouldn't worry about that because it might be corrected by a simple operation."

Brantwood had been looking at me curiously, as though he were trying to decide whether the excitement had gone to my head.

"There's no use talking nonsense," he interjected. "I came here to buy a saddle horse. Did you ever see anyone get a horse for such a foolish amount of money as twenty-five dollars?"

"Let us not go into the things I have seen along that line," I urged plaintively, "because I have already torn myself away from important matters of big business, and *tempus* is *fugiting* very rapidly. Just in passing, however, I might say that once, on the southwest coast of Arizona, I saw a certain party get a horse for considerably less than the modest sum that has been mentioned. In fact, all it cost him was the fatigue incidental to saddling and mounting the fiery charger in the dark of the moon. He got the horse and the gang got him and he got his—and the matter ended there."

For some reason, this airy persiflage did not appeal to Mr. Maiwurm of the roving eye. From the moment I placed a price upon Cleo his worst suspicions were confirmed and he turned a faded and odorous shoulder upon me.

"What do you think of his action?" he asked Brantwood, nodding toward the horse, which was going to sleep with its head on Joe's shoulder.

"Why, it's all right, I guess," he said timorously, "but I was just thinking—doesn't he breathe kind of funny?"

"Breathe funny? I never noticed nothin' funny about his breathin'," the livery man retorted.

"Don't blame the horse," I interposed, laying a hand on my misguided friend's arm, "he's trying to keep from laughing. He overheard Mr. Maiwurm saying he was worth a hundred and seventy-five dollars."

They walked stiffly away from me after that. It was evident that Brantwood resented my reflections upon his horse-sense. Maiwurm went up to Cleo, seized her sensitive upper lip and elicited a broad smile.

"Look at that!" he exclaimed, as though we had suspected the horse of being a toothless old wreck.

"Fine set of teeth," he admitted. "Don't you think so?" he added, turning to me.

"They appear to need cleaning, but aside from that I guess Cleo can gnaw his way through life, all right," I said. "What's the idea of the dental display?"

Maiwurm had a withering glance of scorn for my ignorance.

"It shows how old the horse is," he explained. "He has one tooth for every year."

"Ah! And this is his second set, of course," I suggested.

The livery man did not deign a reply, and Branty said something cutting about choosing the time for my cheap comedy.

"All right; I'll take him," he then said to Maiwurm. "He looks pretty good to me."

He brought up, from an inner pocket, a roll of yellow bills that looked like a pound of butter, and the horse dealer managed to focus his rollicking eye on it as they moved toward his grimy office.

"Here! Wait a minute!" I called to Brantwood. "You're not going to buy this horse without trying him under the saddle, are you?"

"That isn't at all necessary. I know a horse when I see him," he returned stiffly.

I gave him up, with a sigh of resignation. There's no use wasting gray matter on a man who has made up his mind to make an ass of himself, so I waited outside the office while the negotiations were concluded. When they emerged, Maiwurm had a decided list to starboard, and I shrewdly guessed that the roll had changed hands.

"I'll send Joe around with him tomorrow, Mr. Brantwood," he said, "and if you haven't decided where you're goin' to buy your saddle and bridle, I can give you a card to a brother o' mine in that business who can save you a little money."

"Get thee behind me, Maiwurm," I genially observed. "Whatever money your family saves will be credited to the general account."

We went away then, after Branty had cast a lingering look of rapture over Cleo's prominent points of interest as the fatigued hostler led his purchase back to the lower regions.

It was a week later that I met Brantwood again. Horse was uppermost in both our minds and I delicately inquired after Cleo.

"Cleo has only one bad habit, so far as I have observed," Branty informed me.

"His humorous breathing?" I ventured.

"No, I haven't speeded him up to that as yet," Branty admitted, "but he has a most annoying habit of stopping short whenever he feels like it. He goes along all right for a few squares, then he suddenly turns a corner I hadn't figured on at all and brings up at a dead stop. After I wheedle and coax him a little, he starts again and goes on until he gets ready to stop, and there we are—marooned! I can't understand it."

"My dear Watson, nothing is simpler," I replied. "You've been a bit unfortunate in choosing a place for your morning canter, that's all. You seem to have struck Cleo's old milk route. The habit of years is strong in dumb animals, and when you guided your mount into the familiar avenues where he had served so faithfully, and he saw again the customers' homes, wreathed in the mists of the morning—"

"Oh, forget it!" dear old Branty said, quite peevishly. "That isn't a bit funny. I thought maybe you could suggest something. I'm going to see a veterinary about the nag. Maybe he could cure him.

"Good idea," I admitted; "but if you'll take a tip from an innocent bystander, you'll advertise for bids. I imagine it would be quite a contract."

We parted with a distant air of hauteur on Brantwood's side, but when he called me on the telephone a few days later he had recovered his *camaraderie*. In fact, he was solicitous as to my health and well-being, beyond his usual inquiries.

"Oh, by the way, you remember that when you were going with me to buy that horse I told you I might want you to go to court as a witness for me," he suggested.

"Distinctly," I admitted.

"Well, I guessed right. I do want you," Branty replied.

"My worst fears are realized. You are going to sue Maiwurm for obtaining money under false pretenses," I ventured.

"Worse than that," Brantwood returned. "I have been arrested for horse-stealing. I am out on bail and will need you at the hearing tomorrow."

"What's the idea?" I gently asked.

"Cleo and I got caught in a rainstorm yesterday," he explained, "and I had to take shelter in the nearest house. Cleo went straight to the barn when I rode in at the wagon-gate, and the fellow who owns the place came out to see what the racket was about. Blessed if he didn't claim the horse! He said Cleo was stolen out of his barn a few weeks ago. He's a milkman and he knows every harness mark on the nag!"

"Harness marks?" I repeated. "We didn't see any harness marks, did we?"

"No; because that thief, Maiwurm, had glued horsehair all over them," Branty said, "and when the rain washed it off, there they were. Why, that horse was painted up like a chorus girl. You wouldn't know him now!"

"I don't suppose he'd know me, either," I suggested. "But then, we met only once. I take it that the dairyman was hectic and wrathy."

"The chump wouldn't listen to my explanations at all," Brantwood complained. "He called a big, two-fisted hired man to hold me in the barn while he telephoned for the sheriff and, if the justice of the peace hadn't had a little common sense, I might have been in jail all night! You'll be on hand tomorrow to go to court with me, won't you?"

I said I would and hung up. I hate going to court. But when a fellow has fool friends like Brantwood—

Ah, well. They're what help to make the world go 'round.

THE ENGINEER AND THE PILOT

BY NATHANIEL DICKINSON

It is dangerous business for an engineer with greasy hands and overalls to introduce his girl to a pilot with manicured nails and immaculate uniform, and then try to repair the damage when Romance sustains a compound fracture.

PATTERSON leaned out over the low rail of the gangway-port and surveyed the river above. It was black, as black as the pall of the sky above it, as black as the grime on the engineer's hands, as the frown on his dark face and the mood which caused it whenever the picture of the dapper young pilot, in his natty blue uniform and black-visored cap, on the upper deck, passed before his mind and stirred afresh the hate which lay smouldering in the depths of his soul.

There was something soothing, then, in the very anger of the elements to the engineer of the *Sayville*. The startling, vivid whiteness of the white-caps which here and there showed their teeth against the black-green of the river, the dull glow of red, half-way up the northern horizon, which marked the track of the coming storm, and the yellow-white glare of the twisting lightning which played against the inkiness in the northeast were all akin to his mood, and strangely comforting.

"We'll get it," he prophesied gloomily to himself, "and it looks like hell-fire," he vagarized, and then fell to wondering what hell was like, and if it could be any worse than his present existence.

For Patterson was in love, and only this morning he had discovered the full metes and bounds of this passion and the other great one—Hate. For the one he was indebted to a certain girl whom he had known but a month; for the other to the young pilot of the *Sayville*, whom he had known for years.

That it was all his own doing, this present condition of affairs, did not tend to ease his hate, or his love. Two weeks ago he and Bolton, the pilot, had been friends, and harmony reigned between the engine-room and the pilot-house. Then, in a moment of that foolish confidence which lovers have, he had taken the pilot to call on the girl he was to marry, and this had been the beginning of the end as far as the rough engineer was concerned, for the pilot's hands were not grimy, and his voice was low and pleasant, and well in keeping with his good-looking face and active figure, and then, too, conscience and love are sworn enemies, and the girl was not without her charms. So, from a friend of both, the pilot became a friend of each, which is vastly different in such cases, and a coolness grew between him and Patterson, for his visits became too frequent, and were too obviously welcomed for the engineer to pass unnoticed.

But Patterson's pride was of a nature which kept him silent, and in silence the coolness grew between him and the girl he loved and his old friend, Bolton. And then, this very morning, had come the inevitable. When he had gone to say good-bye to his promised wife, he found her in the little garden he had grown so to care for, in the arms of another man—Bolton.

Something had seemed to snap in him, then, for he had stopped in his tracks with an expression almost of horror in his eyes. He was too dazed to be angry then. It was the going of his faith in woman and in man, and his simple mind needed time to digest this perfidy.

The girl had sprung from the arms of her new lover with a cry of alarm, and he stood ready to fight for his very life with the man he had wronged, for there was

that in the other's eyes which was not good to see.

But the big engineer had slowly passed his huge hand across his eyes, turned and walked out the gate and down the street again. There was something terrible in this—more so than if he had vented his rage then and there, and it hung over the two and their clandestine love like a cloud, making her fearing instead of loving, and him strangely awkward.

Now, the cloud had passed from Patterson's brain and left him with one clear thought, and that the desire to kill. Anger which stirred him to the very depths swept over him in waves from time to time and grew on him as he dwelt on his great wrong. Beads of perspiration which were not the result of the temperature of his engine-room stood out on his forehead, and now and then in a sane moment he felt, with a queer sub-consciousness, that his nails were driven into his palms and that every nerve in his body was tingling.

The jingle of bells in the engine-room called him back to the present and his post. He cast a last look at the black thunderstorm, and went back to his engine as though he had said a last good-bye to this world.

When the *Sayville* cast off her moorings at six o'clock and swung away from her dock, the rising storm had already brought night down over the river, and the dull red in the north had faded in the approaching rain.

Up in the pilot-house they had called for full speed in spite of the narrow channel, in the hope that the steamer might run away from the storm, as might well have been the case had this storm, as many other thunder-storms, been localized within a radius of a few miles. But they were in its track, and but a few miles down-stream it overtook the *Sayville* and swept her decks from stem to stern with a deluge of driving rain.

Down among his throttles and levers Patterson received the signal to slow down to half-speed. The pilot had rung that bell, he knew, and to the wild-eyed engineer there was a subtle mockery in it that awoke afresh the rage in him, that his work had for the time driven out. For a moment he stood there motionless, hesitating whether or not to obey the signal and then, his reason coming back to him in a measure, he slowed his engine down.

But a thought had come to him with this hesitation—a thought that widened his eyes and made his head feel strangely light, for it came to him that there was a place on the river, where, if he had hesitated even this short time, it might have meant the death of those in the pilot-house, and this was at the draw-bridge which spanned the river five miles below at Middleburgh.

The draw-men on this and the crew of the steamer were sworn enemies. Time after time the draw had been swung so tardily that the *Sayville* had to back at full speed to save crashing into it. Once, even, the steamer's forward deck had swept under the slowly swinging draw, and for a fascinating minute the huge structure had swung before the scared faces of those in her pilot-house as her reversed engines held her and then slowly, very slowly, backed her away from danger.

This incident had cost one draw-man his position, but another as inimical had come, and the feud waxed stronger, until of late it had come to be the custom rather than the exception for the *Sayville* to have to back her engines on entering the narrow channel between the island above the bridge and the left bank, before the slowly opening draw.

This Patterson knew and counted on in his plan for revenge, and now he blessed these same draw-men as he had often cursed them, down in the bowels of the steamer, and waited all too impatiently in the delirium of his black hate for the time to come when he should know by the signals that they were approaching the bridge. What did it matter to him that with the guilty the innocent might be murdered? What mattered it to him that he was imperilling the lives of two hundred, passengers and officers and crew of the steamer? He had but the thought for

one thing, and that was the death of the pilot.

In the pilot-house all was dark but for the shaded binnacle light. Bolton stood at the wheel. At his right hand was the mate, at his left, one of the quartermasters. Far down the river, the lights of the draw-bridge twinkled red and green and white in the dark night, and the pilot breathed a sigh of relief, for the river widened below this, and it had been a wild trip through the storm, with the flashes of lightning flooding the river in brilliant light one moment and leaving it in darkness so intense the next that he could not see the forward deck below him.

The lights on the bridge grew, and out of the night its huge framework took form like some Titan net spread to catch the steamer. They were but a hundred yards from it now. "Give her the whistle," ordered the pilot, and the quartermaster pulled the cord and sent a hoarse blast out over the river, which sounded like the bellow of some huge leviathan, and died away in many echoes among the hills on either side of the stream.

But the lights on the bridge did not change. A bar of light from the steamer's searchlight threw the dripping structure into sudden daylight, and played along the draw, searching each nick and corner with its brilliant rays and sending a path of light down the river beyond. Then and only then the men on the draw tardily started to swing it.

"Stop her and back her!" the mate ordered. Bolton gave the signals, and all three waited expectantly, anxiously. The vibration of the engines ceased, and for a moment the big river-boat glided on in stately silence.

And then, with the structure of the bridge towering but the steamer's own length before it, came the vibrations again, and the *Sayville* seemed fairly to leap forward, with her engines running at full speed ahead!

For a moment the men in the pilot-house were startled out of speech and action and then, with an inarticulate cry, the mate snatched the bell-cord from the pilot's hand and pulled it furiously. But still the engines pounded ahead at full speed. The steamer's forward deck swept under the draw, which had swung but a few feet, and the towering mass of the bridge loomed before the pilot-house. "Hell!" cried the mate, and, his courage deserting him, he flung the pilot-house door open and sprang out, the quartermaster close on his heels.

Bolton, alone, stood at his post. Whatever else his faults, he had the courage which makes heroes. He knew now. It came to him in a moment—Patterson's treachery and its cause. In a way, he told himself, he was responsible for the lives of the passengers, of the officers and crew of this boat, for had it not been for him, all this would not have happened. And yet, as he faced death, a last wistful thought of what might have been came to him as the face of the girl passed before his mind's eye in that kaleidoscope of impending dissolution which comes at such a time.

For a moment he stood thus, and then it seemed to him that the mass before him was hurled at his head. He ducked, instinctively. Then came a rending crash, a shudder ran through the steamer, and he was hurled to the deck. As he lay half-stunned, he saw the dark mass of the bridge sweep over him, saw the deck-house swept before it like paper, and the big funnels bend and crash to the deck below, and then he saw that the black sky was above him again, and realized that he was still clinging to the wheel, and this, with its strong bracing, had protected him from the deck-house, which had gone to pieces on it. He put it hard over and headed the wreck for the soft bank.

So Patterson, the engineer, did not gain his wish after all. But that was Bolton's last trick at the wheel. His life had been spared, but his nerve had gone forever.

Down in the engine room they found a raving maniac where once had been the best engineer on the river.

And the third actor in this tragedy—the girl who was to marry each in turn? She is the wife of another.

(Continued from page 2)

big incident does not stand out so prominently as it should, because the author, in filling in the framework of his plot, has created an obvious lack of proportion between his incidents and the desired impression. The story, therefore, while fulfilling certain requirements, fails to fulfill some very important ones.

The Terrible Brink is a story that does not depend upon clever plot construction for its appeal. The author shows a thorough knowledge both of the rattler and its habits and the workings of the brain of a strong, healthy man under the stress of unusual circumstances. And having placed the man in a perilous position, the author wisely refrains from investing him with any overdrawn qualities of heroism, but puts him through a series of emotions: the struggle against fear, the quixotic resolution to face the reptile whatever the cost and finally the saner and firmer resolution which proves to be his salvation. The character fights two battles: one the physical effort to keep his position, the other the mental struggle of suspense. It is a true fight of silent waiting rather than action. That the whole story hinges upon a trifling fact about the habits of a rattlesnake, makes the art in its telling more admirable. This story is an allegory that should be ranked with "Everywoman" and above "Experience."

The Subscribers' Serial has an ingenious plot, but it is a story which does not achieve high rank because of poor workmanship. The short, jerky style is tiresome. The self-consciousness of the author is plainly in evidence. In fact the story is not written according to Hoyle. Or is it J. Berg Esenwein?

The Epic of Old Cark is a straight narrative tale without much punch or surprise. The interest is chiefly maintained by the incidents as they materialize. There are many pleasing features, but the story lacks something to make it superior. This may be due largely to the author's failure to enlist the reader's sympathy for Old Cark.

The five dollar prize winners in the fifth contest were Mrs. Alice Cameron, Detroit, Mich.; G. Lombard Kelly, Augusta, Ga.; Elmer I. Ransom, Augusta, Ga.; E. A. Kirkwood, San Francisco, Cal.; Albert E. Brager, Philadelphia, Pa.

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The Eighth Contest comprises the stories in this issue, (July); and all lists must be received at the office of THE BLACK CAT, Salem, Mass., before August 1st. Prizes will be awarded August 10th; and the result of the contest will be announced in the October BLACK CAT, issued September 15th.

A PRIZE OF $25 will be awarded to the author of the story which is selected as the best story of the month by the largest number of club members.

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